

WORKERS

WWW.CPBML.ORG.UK

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2024 £1



STAND UP FOR THE ARTS!

NHS No, it's not broken

Foreign wars Stay out

Scotland Build a new era

Just transition? It's a myth

Water Clear demand

Labour Change the debate

Skills Training blockade

TUC The mood swings

Rail Pay rises won

plus Historic Notes,

News, Reviews and

more

JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

WORKERS



Focus on Britain! No to foreign wars!

ESCALATING military action in the Middle East rightly worries British workers. But nothing good comes from involving Britain in these conflicts.

Support for Israel and the attempt to divide the region into aggressors and defenders risk further escalation. We should simply say, “Stay out!” We have many matters to deal with here and many calls on our resources and energies.

The well prepared invasion of south Lebanon on 1 October by Israel marked a further escalation of regional conflicts. Tensions in the region were ramped up by Hamas’s terrorist attacks on Israel on 7 October last year and Israel’s response with widely condemned attacks on the people of Gaza.

None of the political leaders want peace. Arming Israel and declaring “Israel’s right to defend herself against Iran’s aggression”, as Keir Starmer did in the Commons on the anniversary of the Hamas attack, only encourages conflict. Does any other country in the Middle East also have the right to self-defence? Apparently not.

Israel is severely stretched, now fighting on several fronts. The prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was deeply unpopular before the 7 October attacks and faces continuing domestic opposition. He is desperately clinging on to power by pandering to warmongers in his government.

Netanyahu’s stance is mirrored by those he is fighting. Hamas is built on the premise of never settling for peace with Israel. Iranian proxies, Hezbollah

in Lebanon and Houthis in Yemen, perpetually seek to chip away at Israel on Iran’s behalf. Now Iran has directly entered the fray with missile attacks, designed to provoke Israel and its supporters.

Israel has always benefited from a “special relationship” with the USA. It is not a member of NATO, but is a “major non-NATO ally”. In July 2022 President Biden signed the Jerusalem Declaration, strengthening these already close relations.

In effect Israel has the backing of NATO and Britain, whatever it does. It is now consulting the US about suitable Iran targets to hit. These reportedly include oil outlets, water supplies, air defence systems, assassinations of senior officials, even perhaps nuclear facilities.

This brinkmanship – by Iran, Israel, USA, Britain and the rest of NATO – can only lead to further and more widespread conflict. Meanwhile Starmer calls for de-escalation and wrings his hands about deaths and suffering. But, continuing the policy of his predecessor, he stands right with Netanyahu.

The embattled peoples of all these lands are weary of endless war. They alone can bring lasting peace by settling accounts with the barbarians who claim to represent them.

For our part, British workers should demand that our representatives stop supporting what are effectively calls for open war. We need our forces to defend our borders and our interests, not indulge in post-imperial sabre rattling.



Cover photo by Adam Gasson/PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo



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

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

www.cpbml.org.uk [@cpbml](https://twitter.com/cpbml)
Issue 245, November/December 2024

Contents – November/December 2024

News Digest

Pay rises on the railways, p3; Carbon capture: three schemes announced, p4; Cuts in arts education, p5

03

Features

No, the NHS is not broken, p6; Not a skills shortage, more a training blockade, p8; TUC mood swings, p11; One era ends in Scotland – time to build a new one, p12; Grangemouth: the myth of a “just transition”, p14; Clean water – a clear demand, p16; Stand up for the arts!, p18

06

End Notes

Theatre review: The Lehman Trilogy, p20; Historic Notes: The Middle East, 1920 to 1948 – Mandate and misrule, p22

20



- [PAY](#)
- [CPBML CONGRESS](#)
- [CARBON CAPTURE](#)
- [RAIL](#)
- [ARTS](#)
- [UNIVERSITY PAY](#)
- [FACTS MATTER](#)
- [E-NEWSLETTER](#)
- [ON THE WEB](#)
- [WHAT'S ON](#)

- [Rises on the railways](#)
- [Summary published](#)
- [Three schemes announced](#)
- [New Bristol station](#)
- [Education cuts](#)
- [Still not settled](#)
- [References online](#)
- [How to subscribe](#)
- [More news online](#)
- [Coming soon](#)



Workers

RMT pickets, Wolverhampton, May 2023. Photo Workers.

Pay rises on the railways

RAIL WORKERS in most train operating companies – members of RMT, TSSA and Unite – have voted to accept the national pay deal that brings to an end a period of intermittent strikes and other industrial action over more than two years.

The agreement gives a 4.75 per cent increase for 2023, and a 4.5 per cent increase for 2024. This follows the acceptance of a similar national offer to most train drivers to settle their separate dispute.

And in both cases, the new Labour government dropped its predecessor’s insistence that pay increases must be coupled to bringing in highly unpalatable changes to terms and conditions. Those proposed conditions had met with determined opposition from all the unions, which was not going to be dropped after the election.

Despite the strikes and the disruption arising from the long-running disputes, passenger numbers have continued to climb after the end of the pandemic. The return of more stable industrial relations in the railway industry is likely to see even more passengers.

Growth in passenger numbers highlights the need for much more investment in capacity, as well as in quality and reliability. ■

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

CPBML CONGRESS Summary published

THE CPBML has published a new document that brings together the major lines of thought to emerge from its Congress in June this year.

The major thrust is that workers must focus on Britain and use the independence won in 2016. Brexit was a fundamental transformation: a start of a change in working class ideology. “The class made a proper decision: it told the ruling class, you can’t have the strategy that you want. We will not allow you to submerge Britain into a bloc. We will not allow you to enforce the uncontrolled movement of capital and people,” notes the document.

This was the a real change from social democracy. Brexit stripped away the veils – and now it’s back to class struggle. It has exposed the ruling class’s inadequacies..

Congress emphasised that the Party’s role is to assist the process of continuing this drive for independence, which workers must do through class organisation.

The full document is available free at 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



Courtesy of Bristol Rail Campaign



Campaigners celebrate on the platform at Ashton Down.

ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at cpbml.org.uk

Employment rights – still blocked

The Employment Rights Bill, published on 10 October, does not repeal all the anti-union acts enforced by Thatcher and her successors, Tory and Labour. And the promises of change don't stand up to scrutiny.

No to fire and rehire

Food manufacturer Oscar Mayer wants to fire and rehire over 500 workers at its Wrexham factory to reduce wages. The workers began a 4-week strike in September, extended when the firm refused to negotiate.

The boiler tax is back

The new government wants to revive a policy of its predecessor to increase heat pump take up by taxing gas boilers. Its enthusiasm for net zero makes it blind to the reason why the idea was dropped.

Action over pay on the Tube

Transport unions Aslef and RMT are planning strikes over pay on London Underground. In separate disputes both will be taking action in early November.

Net Zero is a trade union issue

This year's TUC showed rising tension between an ideological support of net zero and the real-world impacts on workers. A life-long trade unionist has contacted *Workers* with his observations.

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.

Rail success in Bristol

BRISTOL CELEBRATED a new station at the end of September. This is the result of a long and determined campaign, which has further improvements in its sights.

On 28 September the first train for 64 years served passengers at Ashton Down. The new station, costing £12 million, is the second one opened under the MetroWest programme. The Bristol Rail Campaign (formerly Friends of Suburban Bristol Railways) has played a significant part in this achievement.

This campaign was launched by a group of people who believed that the city's railways were underused and in danger of being lost. They see integrated, accessible and affordable transport as important for everyone who lives and works there. Bristol's road traffic is notoriously bad.

It has been an uphill fight at times, but the campaign continues on other fronts. One target is to reconnect northern parts of the city to the rail network. Another is to secure integration with buses and resolve fare structuring issues that will help to realise the passenger potential of the station.

And above all, these lines need electrification to secure their future. But as one of the campaigners said, "There's so much still to do. But this was a good day!"

CARBON CAPTURE Three schemes announced

THE GOVERNMENT has announced funding of £22 billion for carbon capture schemes. Originally there were to be eight sites for capture and storage projects, but only three were announced, in Teesside and Merseyside.

Carbon capture is claimed to be an answer to reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide emissions. But industrial scale development has been hard to achieve.

Three earlier carbon capture projects have failed to see the light of day: BP's 2005 plan for a gas power plant with CO2 storage near Peterhead was never more than a concept. Two years later a competition for projects collapsed after one of the bidders withdrew. In 2016 the Cameron government cancelled a £1 billion project on grounds of affordability.

The figure of £22 billion is about the amount of the financial "black hole" the new government claimed to have found in public finances on taking office. The carbon

capture programme so far is predicted to create a mere 4,000 jobs – and that's not certain.

Carbon capture aims to compress CO2 into liquid and store it underground, sometimes in disused oil and gas reservoirs. But there are still risks from leakage in the long term.

The National Audit Office warned in a report in July, before the latest announcement, that carbon capture technology is "nascent" and that new complexities will emerge.

Inevitably, capitalism has turned this into a market: on the voluntary carbon market, instruments which represent a tonne of CO2 can be traded. Companies creating emissions can buy credits and count these against their climate goals. The longer they promise to keep the CO2 locked away, the more expensive the instrument.

There are 42 carbon capture projects in operation worldwide. While ones in the oil industry manage to turn a profit, those that plan to store carbon permanently to reduce emissions have never been financially viable.

UNIVERSITY PAY

Still not settled

PAY FOR university workers is still not settled. The five unions representing higher education workers submitted a claim in April, but there's no agreement.

Lecturers and researchers are members of the University and College Union (UCU). On 27 September its HE committee rejected the employers' "full and final" pay offer for 2024-25 – a staged approach for "uplifts" ranging from 2.5 per cent to 5.7 per cent.

That offer would mean most members receiving the lower amount: in effect another pay cut. In contrast most public sector workers have won rises of over 5 per cent.

The pay offer is staged, so workers would not even be paid the full amount of the "uplift" from August 2024. Instead, pay would increase by £75 each month until

February 2025, with 2.5 per cent paid only from March. The union described this aspect of the offer as "a damaging novelty", setting a precedent that it could not accept.

The UCU had already rejected a similar offer in July and decided to campaign for industrial action to win a better offer. It says the terms of a review on pay structure are acceptable, but the offer for this year is not. It will hold a consultative ballot of members.

Threats of mass closures and redundancies in the sector remain. Workers in HE need to be working out how to defend the whole sector, how to win more funds to support pay and jobs. The most recent UCU HE conference on 17 May voted to "develop a strategy which includes returning to UK-wide action in academic year 2024-25."

Unison, representing administrative and other HE workers, is taking a similar line. After an online consultation it expects to hold a ballot for action in November. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

NOVEMBER

Saturday 2 November 12 noon to 3pm
RAF Lakenheath, Suffolk

"Don't put Britain on the nuclear front line"

CND national demonstration against US nukes returning to Lakenheath. For more information, see cnd.org.uk/lakenheath

Sunday 3 November 11am to 3pm
Albert Embankment, London

"The march for clean water"

Stop the poisoning of Britain's waters. For more detail, see marchforcleanwater.org

Tuesday 5 November 7pm

Online CPBML discussion meeting (via Zoom)

"Mass immigration – war on the working class"

Capitalism encourages mass immigration to keep wages low, deskill jobs and weaken working class unity. How should British workers respond? Come and discuss. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation.

Saturday 30 November 2pm

The Britons Protection, 50 Great Bridgewater Street, Manchester M1 5LE

In person CPBML public meeting

"Immigration, class and nation"

For decades British governments have encouraged massively increased immigration. Not only is this an economic attack, it is also fostering divisions between workers.

JANUARY

Tuesday 14 January 7pm

Online CPBML discussion meeting (via Zoom)

"Why industry matters"

The government has overseen the closure of blast furnaces at Tata Steel. It is against British industry, skills and jobs. Come and discuss. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation.

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



The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama: planning to cut its junior programmes.

Cuts in arts education

ARTS EDUCATION provision across Britain is suffering from continuing cuts including instrumental music, drama and visual arts. Workers in arts and education are trying to build campaigns to counter this decline. In September the TUC supported a motion for increased arts funding, including arts education. This may be a spur to further pressure on government and councils across the country.

Chris Walters from the Musicians' Union said earlier this year, "England's network of music education hubs, introduced by government in 2012 to address nationwide inequalities in children's access to music provision, have operated on standstill funding for a decade and struggled to narrow the musical divide they were created to close." He points to the outcome, "The net result is that learning a musical instrument is now not really accessible unless your parents can pay for it."

The Artists' Union England added its voice to this aspect of the campaign, calling for arts education to be restored throughout primary, secondary, further and higher education. They also called upon the TUC to support and lobby for publicly funded arts.

Another body campaigning for the arts as an essential part of education is the Workers Music Association. Ben Lunn, chair of the Musicians' Union Scotland & Northern Ireland, who addressed a rally against arts cuts in Edinburgh on 5 September, pointed to its legacy of advocating proper funding for the arts since at least 1945, when it published *Music in Post War Britain*, surveying the many facets of musical life and how to assure their well-being. ■

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

The government is keen – alarmingly keen – to say that ministers would like it to be...

No, the NHS is not broke

WHAT IS the Labour government up to with our NHS? On coming to office, they commissioned the respected surgeon Lord Ara Darzi to conduct a review of the NHS in England. This was published on 12 September.

But before the review was even begun, health secretary Wes Streeting pronounced the NHS to be “broken”, rushing out his diagnosis before the assessment. Then when the review was published, Keir Starmer again called the NHS “broken”. Yet that was not what the report concluded.

In fact, the concluding chapter of the Darzi review has the title “The NHS is in critical condition, but its vital signs are strong.” And crucially he has confidence in NHS staff to fix the problems and explicitly states, “Many of the solutions can be found in parts of the NHS today. The vast array of good practice that already exists in the health service should be the starting point for the plan to reform it.”

That is not a diagnosis of “broken”.

Since the report has been published the government has made little reference to it and the findings have not featured prominently in the BBC and other media discussions of the service. This is a report they wish to bury. The onus is on the working class and its organisations, the trade unions, to make sure that the Darzi review is widely read and shared.

The review does not in any way seek to minimise the current problems in the NHS. It highlights the struggle to see a GP and the long waits in Accident and Emergency as particularly worrying, citing the Royal



Workers

NHS productivity will not improve without capital investment in buildings. Airedale General Hospital aerated concrete (RAAC) – light, bubbly and profoundly unsafe – is going to have to be rebuilt.

‘Darzi’s first recommendation is the antithesis of the Streeting and Starmer narrative of the broken NHS...’

College of Emergency Medicine data on long waits in A&E causing 14,000 unnecessary deaths each year.

Cancer

Similarly, the report notes that Britain has appreciably higher cancer mortality rates than other countries. It notes that no progress whatsoever was made in diagnosing cancer at stage I and II between 2013 and 2021 and lists a range of issues with cancer treatment.

The report says that cardiovascular care is “going in the wrong direction” with worsening outcomes. A particular concern is the wide regional variations.

One example is that the percentage of

suspected stroke patients who receive the necessary brain scan within an hour of arrival at hospital varies from 80 per cent in Kent to only around 40 per cent in Shropshire.

The report does not seek to duplicate the recent detailed Care Quality Commission report into maternity care, rather it concurs with the conclusion that many maternity services require urgent improvements. The Royal College of Midwives agrees, and warns against ignoring them.

But none of these serious issues led Darzi to declare the NHS to be broken. In fact, he writes that, “Nothing that I have found draws into question the principles of

the NHS is “broken”. You might almost think that

en



hospital, constructed with reinforced autoclaved

a health service that is taxpayer funded, free at the point of use, and based on need, not ability to pay.”

He points out that with 2.8 million of the population economically inactive due to long term illness, having more people in work is crucial to growing the economy and therefore “It is not a question of whether we can afford the NHS. Rather, we cannot afford not to have the NHS, so it is imperative that we turn the situation around.”

Underfunding

The remit given to him prevented him from making funding recommendations, but he is absolutely clear in his findings on the dam-

age of underfunding since 2010: “The 2010s were the most austere decade since the NHS was founded, with spending growing at around 1 per cent in real terms... The NHS has been starved of capital and the capital budget was repeatedly raided to plug holes in day-to-day spending.”

He blames this austerity – not staff – for much of the NHS’s ills: “Crumbling buildings, services disrupted at 13 hospitals a day in 2022-23, a backlog maintenance bill [of] more than £11.6 billion, and a lack of capital means too many outdated scanners, too little automation, and parts of the NHS yet to enter the digital era.”

Darzi is particularly critical of the Andrew Lansley reforms of the 2010 coalition government. He writes: “Just imagine if all the effort and resource that had been poured into dissolving and reconstituting management structures [post the 2012 Act] had been invested in improving the delivery of services...The result of the disruption was a permanent loss of capability from the NHS. Experienced managers left, meaning the NHS lost their skills, relationships and institutional memory.”

The combined effect of the austerity and the Lansley reforms meant that the NHS was not in a good position when the pandemic hit.

What needs to be done?

The government did ask Darzi to identify major themes for the forthcoming 10-year health plan. His first recommendation is to re-engage staff, as he argues that despite all the challenges and low morale, NHS staff hold the key to making improvements.

This is the antithesis of the Streeting and Starmer narrative of a broken NHS. There is already evidence that the “broken NHS” narrative is adversely affecting recruitment to the NHS. Recruitment to nursing was not hit by the pandemic and rose in 2021. But far fewer people applied to study nursing this September – down by over a fifth according to a report in the *Nursing Times*.

The report also makes a number of suggestions about how the financial systems in the NHS need to be aligned to delivering care closer to people’s homes, and makes a range of suggestions for

reducing the waiting lists. Despite the injunction not to mention funding, he is very clear that NHS productivity will not improve without capital investment in buildings, equipment and technology.

The report is explicit that “a top-down reorganisation of NHS England and Integrated Care Boards is neither necessary nor desirable”, but states that there is more work to be done to clarify roles and accountabilities, ensure the right balance of management resources in different parts of the structure, and strengthen key processes such as capital approvals.

Welcomed

Professional associations broadly welcomed Lord Darzi’s report and the emphasis on the need to value the people who work in the NHS. But several, including the BMA, are too ready to accept the government’s assessment of the service as “broken”. That may prove to be a distraction and an obstacle to implementing Darzi’s proposals.

Unison represents many people working in the NHS. Its general secretary, Christina McAnea, said in response to the report, “Employees need to be convinced the health service can be saved and that it has a future they want to be part of.”

NHS workers, their professional bodies and trade unions can make a start on breaking the cycle of denigration and neglect. They all have know what’s wrong and ideas on how to fix it. Leaving it to a government whose only real aim is to be re-elected will not meet the need.

In the 1980s the Thatcher government commissioned the Black Report on health inequalities. When she did not like its conclusions, she limited the print run. In response trade unions and other organisations arranged their own print run, and it became one of the best-known public health reports of the 20th century.

Workers in the NHS, and the rest of us, should take the same approach to the Darzi review.

Lord Darzi’s own ten-page summary of his findings and recommendations is an accessible introduction to the comprehensive 163 pages full review – share it and talk about what’s to be done. ■

It's bad business as usual: employers and their government no accident, either, rather a deliberate policy...

Not a skills shortage, mo



workingwales/Alamy Stock Photo

Forestry Skills Education, Wales: people taking part in a one-day training workshop in how to care for and safely use a chainsaw.

IN THE new Employment Rights Bill, you will find that the generic right to skills training is noticeable by its absence, as is the assigning of responsibility to employers to provide it, or even allow workers time off to obtain it for themselves.

The bill's designers will know that employment without the right to training is an insecure and rocky road leaving workers at the mercy of the market. Yet it fails to address the precarious position of unskilled workers, and it fails to ensure skilled workers have the right to be upskilled, potentially leaving them also in the same state.

The deliberate decision of British employers not to train workers is a national scandal and largely responsible for the desperate state of the British labour market. What is called a skills shortage is actually a well planned training blockade for workers in Britain. There's nothing accidental or incompetent about it.

The blockade has gone on for decades and is testament to the ruinous business plans in which many employers in Britain consciously make little or no mention of training for workers. And those who do are reducing their commitment.

The International Monetary Fund report *Upskilling the UK Workforce* tells us that Britain's workforce has "larger and more chronic skills gaps than in most peer countries". Surveys report widespread recruitment difficulties, with implications for output, in high-skill sectors like digital and software, manufacturing, medicine and life sciences, teaching, and construction.

One key reason, the report explains, is the decline in workplace training and apprenticeships, particularly for the young. The apprenticeship levy, introduced in 2017, even with the recent minor reforms,

nts continue to blockade training for British workers. It's

More a training blockade



was flawed from the start in many ways – criticised by employers and trade unions.

But the levy was never going to work in an established culture that relies on skilled workers from abroad – which employers want and unions have not challenged.

The IMF report makes it clear that the British government has for some time been desperately trying to recruit non-EU migrants to replace the EU migrants we were always told made no difference to the British labour market, or to training, or to pay and conditions.

The report laments that the “recent

increase in non-EU migrants has not fully offset the adverse impact from Brexit on the availability of needed skills, including because smaller firms face more recruitment hurdles with regard to non-EU hires.”

Here we see the clear and persistent push of global capitalism onto governments to facilitate mass immigration, which of course it is willing to do.

But even the IMF is clear that “there is an urgent need to upskill the UK workforce”. They identify five crucial elements to addressing the dilemma:

Encourage students and young workers to join and excel in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics); ensure adequate vocational and on the job training, particularly for the young; retain the talent produced by Britain’s world-leading universities; upskill the existing labour force; and facilitate attraction and retention of in-demand skills through adjustments to the visa regime.

Migration

The last point reveals the IMF’s true intent – and that’s the most crucial of all in the view of employers. While there is strong evidence of action on visas, it’s hard to find what is being done about the other points.

Employers and the governments that serve them continue to rely on luring skilled workers from countries who can ill afford to lose them. We never hear about that from those members of our class misled into supporting global capitalism’s push for mass movement of workers.

Britain, becoming devoid of meaningful training capacity, is of course a preferred destination point. It is foolish to overlook this attack on the working class here and abroad and to see it as an issue of racism. And it’s convenient for global capitalism that so many have fallen into that trap.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), a respected source of research on employer behaviour, makes clear in its recent report, *Employer Views on Skills Policy in the UK*, that skills are a key driver of economic performance and productivity, for organisations themselves as well as for the wider economy. They are also fundamental for individuals, determining employment and

‘The refusal to train workers is largely responsible for the desperate state of the British labour market...’

earnings potential.

The report admits that post-Brexit employers face a challenging recruitment context, with three-quarters reporting that they have hard-to-fill vacancies. There are issues with both the volume and quality of applicants, with the biggest gaps in specialist and technical skills, as well as broader employability skills, such as problem-solving and communication.

The CIPD, an organisation that supports employers, is keen to demonstrate that the employers who take a more strategic approach to skills – conducting a workforce planning exercise, putting a training plan in place and having a training budget – are much more likely to invest in skills, engage with education institutions and training providers, and prepare for the future.

This highlights the critical importance, the report says, of building the people management and leadership capabilities of organisations to drive up the demand for skills and training. This is especially true for smaller organisations who either tend to overestimate their grasp on skills or be unaware of their skills challenges.

But as the report shows, many employers still roll out the same mantra that it’s the fault of the education system for not preparing young people for the workplace. Employers have opted out of any notion that they have the responsibility of inducting young people into the workplace.

Instead, schools, further education colleges and especially universities spend

Continued on page 10



Continued from page 9

millions on employability programmes. This was part of the role of the real apprenticeships that began to disappear in the 1970s with the destruction of British industry. Now, the report tells us, employers want young people with “experience of the world, employability skills and common sense”.

Employers say young people have poor attitudes and a lack of motivation. The solution, the CIPD thinks, is more workplace opportunities for young people while in education, and employability skills.

But what is really needed is a change of culture in Britain, a new sense of corporate social responsibility. We should expect employers to support young people: to take them on and teach them the joy of learning new skills and in taking pleasure from a job well done, and the strength workers acquire from a good work ethic.

The really sad thing is that now young people are buying into the employers’ negative view of them. Many even feel they are entirely responsible for their own preparation for work ahead of getting a job.

The CIPD report also finds that too few employers engage with the further education sector and that employer awareness of the government’s technical education

‘What is really needed is a change of culture...’

The training scandal in figures

HEADLINES FROM the latest Employer Skills Survey 2022 compared to 2017

- Employers with at least one vacancy: up, 23 per cent in 2022 (20 per cent in 2017)
- Employers with at least one skill-shortage vacancy: up, 10 per cent (6 per cent)
- Skill-shortage vacancy density (SSVs as a share of vacancies): up, 36 per cent (22 per cent)
- Employers with at least one skill gap (one or more employees not fully proficient): up, 15 per cent (13 per cent)
- Skill gap density (proportion of employees judged not fully proficient): up, 5.7 per cent (4.4 per cent)
- Employers funding or arranging any

staff training during the previous 12 months: down, 60 per cent (66 per cent)

- Employers providing on-the-job training: down, 49 per cent (53 per cent)
- Employers providing off-the-job training: down, 39 per cent (48 per cent)
- Employees receiving training: down, 60 per cent (62 per cent).
- Average investment in training per employee: down £1,780 (£2,010, inflation adjusted).

Even small changes in these percentages represent a large number of workers – Britain has over 30 million people employed. And over 4 million more are self-employed, many are workers by any other name – their skill shortages don’t show up on the employer survey. ■

reforms remains low.

The CIPD’s notion that the new government has “a vision of a revitalised technical and further education sector with employers at its heart” is naïve. But it makes sense that for the reforms to be successful, there is a need to raise awareness and share examples of the positive impact that further education institutions can play in developing workforce skills.

Minor

The last government made minor reforms to the apprenticeship levy. The new one wants to make a few more. The CIPD wants a bigger shift – for employers to be allowed to use levy funding to invest in training delivered by their local FE colleges. And that would also boost business engagement with the system.

Scotland has tried a slightly different way of implementing the levy but most employers there behave just as they do across Britain – criticise the levy and do their usual workarounds.

It is true that some employers are focusing on improving pay and conditions, especially when forced to do so by well unionised workers. Some are upskilling existing staff and offering apprenticeships.

The levy provides an opportunity for policy makers to harness this trend, offer solutions and engage employers in skills-based initiatives. But they won’t do so without more pressure.

Instead the figures show (see Box) employers continuing to blockade training while they wait for the government to usher in the next waves of immigrant workers, preferably from countries where pay and expectations are lower. It’s not a conspiracy – it’s there in plain sight.

If you want a thriving economy, if you want the chance of a secure, fulfilled workforce, and you want young people who feel valued by society and who want to contribute to it through their work, then you must think about how workers can collectively take control. The idea of progress through parliament is a mirage, as the Employment Rights Bill shows.

Currently we have a destructive economic system: on the one hand supported by the unwitting, who foolishly think opposing mass migration of skilled workers from countries that train and need them is racist; and on the other by those actively conniving in the destruction by ensuring workers are unprepared for their own future and for the future of this country. ■

Not all unions are enchanted by the promises of the new Labour government...

TUC mood swings



Members of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy on the TUC demonstration in Cheltenham in January. At the TUC in September they backed a motion congratulating all unions that took action over pay restraint in the public sector.

Workers

MANY TRADE union leaders and delegates at this year's TUC Congress in September were predictably rather starry-eyed about the future following the election of a Labour government. But it wasn't all that way.

TUC general secretary Paul Novak certainly was, opening the congress by stating, "We know Keir Starmer and this government have the interests of working people at heart..." If only...

Delegates were treated to the novelty of being addressed by a prime minister for the first time in fifteen years. Starmer's vacuous speech to the congress referred to the now infamous "£22 billion black hole" in the country's finances.

Mentioning all the usual problems, Starmer painted a vision of blood, sweat and tears. Congress delegates, impatient for real change, simply wouldn't buy it.

Three of Britain's most influential

unions, Unite, GMB and RMT, persuaded Congress to adopt resolutions that rightly demand a lot more from Labour than Starmer promised, and in a rather shorter timeframe.

Investment

One resolution calls for "reforms to unnecessarily restrictive and arbitrary fiscal rules" and "a real industrial strategy" that "includes public ownership and investment and planning to help deliver strategic investment as the basis of sustainable economic growth."

And many other unions tabled motions calling for early investment in key areas including the railways, education, the fire service and prisons.

Even more significant was the resolution that recognised the importance of steel, gas, chemicals, water and manufac-

turing to our prosperity, stability and national security. The resolution went on to point out that "gas remains vital to powering UK manufacturing...as well as 22 million home boilers."

Delivering a slap in the face to energy secretary Ed Miliband, the resolution continued, "Congress notes with dismay that the new government has adopted a target to stop drilling in the North Sea before any plan for jobs has been agreed."

It concluded with a call for "an industrial strategy policy that maximises our domestic energy strengths for national security, with all assets and options part of the solution: nuclear, renewables and oil and gas production" as well as "backing the build of Sizewell C and supporting small modular reactors."

Congress agreed to "do everything in its power to prevent oil and gas workers becoming the miners of net zero. We will not let them suffer the equivalent of the coal closures, which broke the back of mining towns across the UK."

A resolution from civil service union PCS and physiotherapists' union CSP "congratulates all unions that took part in industrial action over the last two years in response to a continuous policy of pay restraint in the public sector, which has had catastrophic consequences for the living standards of public sector workers."

It continued by pointing out that "there is some way to go to restore living standards to where they should be."

Sooner or later that will mean disagreement with the new Chancellor of the Exchequer!

But it wasn't all positive in Brighton. The TUC still cannot quite grasp the realities and indeed the opportunities of Brexit, with a resolution from Prospect whose sub-text was, "we want to rejoin the EU".

A statement from the General Council on racism and the "far right" fails dismally to address the very real concerns that many trade unionists have about uncontrolled immigration.

And two resolutions on the Middle East completely failed to call for the one thing that would make a real difference – to immediately end Britain's involvement and interference in the region. ■

The departure from the political stage of many leading se... marks the end of an era for Scotland and a new opportunity

One era ends in Scotland



Workers

Ben Lunn, chair of the Scotland & Northern Ireland Region of the Musicians' Union, addresses a rally outside the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh on Thursday 5 September called to demand an end to cuts in the arts budget.

THE SCOTTISH National Party, having lost their allies, the Scottish Greens, will attempt to struggle on until the next scheduled election for the Holyrood parliament on 7 May 2026. But in September SNP leader John Swinney began hinting that a snap election could be called in advance of that date.

The administration has been plagued by a sequence of troubles from a housing crisis, high rates of drug deaths, a botched attempt to set up a National Care Service, failures in essential life-line island shipping services, with essential ferries now six

years overdue, and an industrial policy hampered by a zealous green agenda. In addition, public protests led to the withdrawal of the Gender Recognition Act and reversal of some of their planned cuts to arts budgets.

New governance?

Calling an election sooner rather than later may be an attempt to capitalise on the woes afflicting the new Labour government, ones that can be seen as creating an opening for the SNP once people in Scotland begin to feel the effects of

Labour's austerity measures.

However, London and Edinburgh seem to be finding solace in each other's company. It was at the inaugural gathering of the newly formed Council of Nations and Regions in Edinburgh on 11 October that the two party leaders had a face to face meeting.

The concept for this new organisation (dubbed by some as "quasi intergovernmental") was launched in former prime minister Gordon Brown's report for the Labour Party on constitutional reform. It was titled *A New Britain: Renewing our*

separatists, be it through illness, death, scandal or retreat, unity in the quest for a united British nation...

– time to build a new one

Democracy and Rebuilding our Economy, and at its 2024 annual party conference the Labour Party adopted its findings as policy. It contained proposals on “intergovernmental relations” and enhancing devolution as well as a proposal to form a Council of the UK.

The Council of Nations and Regions is the outcome. This is nothing more than a consolidation of the divisiveness of devolution, one more attempt to solve the decline of capitalism. Devolution has not made Britain a more democratic country: it is a recipe for balkanisation, a platform for further strife.

By contrast, the united struggles of trade unionists across Britain over the past two years proves that grassroots unity works.

Objections

Already objections have been levelled at this new body. City areas in Scotland protest that they have been ignored. The leader of Glasgow City Council, Susan Aitken, accused the prime minister of “shutting the door” on Scotland’s largest city, Edinburgh council leader Cammy Day said, “We are concerned that our absence from the summit could place Scotland and its cities at an explicit commercial disadvantage.”

The Council of Nations and Regions has 17 members, bringing the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales and the First and Deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland together with the Mayor of London and the mayoralities of the 11 combined authorities in England.

The distribution of powers and governance employed by this new body is something to keep a sharp eye on. This is an important task because the separatists have been given a voice at the heart of British governance. The end of an era for the SNP? Why breathe life into a party that is mortally wounding itself? Is a federalist structure being created?

Industrial vandalism

We are one British people with common problems. We need a common response to them. Our industries and services require

central control and direction. That is because regional and local units of government are inadequate to deal with the scale of the problems we face.

Courting the Scottish Greens is also a danger for Labour in Scotland. They may begin to heed the Greens’ demand that any plans to build new nuclear reactors be dropped. The SNP administration had banned any new developments using nuclear. The Greens had praised this saying, “the phasing out of nuclear energy has been a huge achievement of devolution.”

But raising fears over nuclear safety does not reflect the reality. A good example is France. It used nuclear power for 68 per cent of its electricity in 2021, as it has for decades. When has it had any accidents? As for the cost, France’s nuclear power results in one of the cheapest energy supplies in Europe.

Its waste is disposed of safely and affordably. Stored on site, it is eventually used as fuel for more advanced nuclear plants. Research from Stonehaven Global Consultancy points out that there has been a steady upturn in support for nuclear in Scotland, even among those who voted for the SNP and Scottish Greens.

Then there is the closure of the oil and gas terminal and production facility at Grangemouth on the River Forth. This has been described by many commentators as industrial vandalism. Protests against the closure have been well organised and vigorous (see article, page 14).

But the protests opposing the closure lack teeth – they are weakened by not demanding the retention of oil and gas. Those resources are continually needed by Britain and will be for years to come. The alternative is importing much more expensive and more polluting fuels from overseas.

Cuts in education

City councils in Edinburgh and Glasgow have announced probable cuts to education services. A report to Edinburgh council in early September laid out proposals for £40 million in savings over the next three years.

Jane Gow, Glasgow secretary for the teaching union EIS, responded, saying,

‘We are one British people with common problems. We need a common response to them...’

“This causes real difficulties for schools where the roll has gone down and core staffing is being cut again. It takes no account of additional support required for pupils with and without recorded support needs. That impossible task is being left to headteachers, some of whom are at their wits’ end trying to provide anything like adequate support for their pupils, parents and staff.”

The proposed cuts would further reduce the quality of education in Scotland. In the year 2000 Scotland was near the top of the OECD’s ranking for English, maths and literacy. By 2016 it had fallen below the average. The bi-annual Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy, set up by the SNP government, showed a fall from 2012 to 2014 and another fall from 2014 to 2016. The SNP government response was simply to close the survey.

A measure of a society’s economic potential is the educational status of its children. The PISA report from the OECD group of economically advanced nations showed that Scotland’s educational outcomes worsened significantly between 2018 and 2022 compared with the British average and with most OECD countries.

Scotland’s biggest fall was in mathematics, from 6 per cent above the OECD average to 5 per cent below. This decline must be obvious to the authorities. Yet they continue to cut and damage our children’s education.

A firm response to the ongoing cuts to culture budgets across Scotland has come in the form of public protests and petitions by those working in the arts, as well as by audiences. ■

Look behind the fine façade of the Just Transition Commission transparency, indifference, and inaction by governments d

Grangemouth: the myth



Workers

Oil and gas: no ban without a plan. Slogan at an August demonstration at Grangemouth.

“EVERYONE KEEPS saying it’s going to go green. There’s opportunities out there but nobody just seems to want to put their name or put a policy to it....”

These words of a worker at the Grangemouth Oil Refinery, buried deep in a Just Transition Commission report annex, come closest to describing the reality of closure.

“We are not dinosaurs”, said the Grangemouth workers, “but the decision to close the place is a fast-paced decision, it’s purely that jobs will go to other countries...” From the horse’s mouth – Scottish Secretary Ian Murray replied he couldn’t

promise jobs: to that extent he was honest.

On 3 October this year, with the refinery due to close in a few months in favour of a terminal importing oil refined abroad, the Scottish government added to the uncertainty by delaying its so-called “just transition” plan until next spring. Such vagueness makes it clear there is no easy plan for the area, just hollow words about “closure and greening shaped in a socially positive way”.

Excuses abound, financial viability being one. Scottish climate minister Alasdair Allen said in Holyrood that delay would give more time to collect evidence

from the Project Willow study, a procrastinating joint government review of the site’s potential as a clean energy hub. They have had over five years to do this.

The Just Transition Commission, supposedly independent, was set up to ease the transition to net zero in Scotland. Its reports, published since 2021, bemoan the limitations of collective efforts and blame Petroineos, a joint venture between foreign state-owned enterprise (PetroChina) and private ownership (Ineos).

Petroineos is castigated for attending only to its corporate interests. Well, it would, wouldn’t it? Government is offload-

mission, and all you find are false promises, lack of
lacking their responsibilities...

of a 'just transition'

ing culpability. Petroineos says there was never any question of government stepping in to save the plant.

It doesn't end there. Grangemouth is a litmus test for the commission, the first of a series of "just transition" plans for Scotland's 20 highest emitting sites. Across Britain workers are told the phase-out of fossil fuels is inevitable – as steelworkers at Port Talbot in Wales and in Scunthorpe know to their cost.

On Teesside, with blast furnaces already closed down and 20,000 jobs lost, new jobs at the projected electric arc furnace will be delayed until at least 2032 due to the inability of the National Grid to provide backup.

Backlash

Fearing a backlash like that over pit closures, the commission aims to get workers to cooperate in an "intergenerational social contract", trusting businesses and colleges to produce skills out of a wasteland. The reward, it says, will be "fair work", meaning jobs for a few, a chimera for most.

The refinery, it goes on, does not define the Grangemouth economy. Tell that to the community – the many small businesses, the supply chain, the retail, the cafes, the cultural and sporting bodies in the area, which depend on spending by the workers and their families, including the North Sea oil and gas riggers home on leave.

The future, they are told, lies with development of the Forth Green Freeport, including Grangemouth and Rosyth (both designated employers' tax relief sites in June this year), and the investment through Individual Savings Accounts and pension funds.

Oil workers are not climate deniers. Many have known from a young age that an energy mix including renewables and nuclear would be the future model. But they are worried about energy security and the deliberate underinvestment in refined products of petrol and aviation fuel, for which the Grangemouth hydrocracker (which upgrades low-quality heavy gas oils) was uniquely suited.

The workers want a longer transition creating a more stable base for notoriously intermittent renewables. Responding to the

commission, they said: "The refinery has to continue refining to be part of that – for new low carbon solutions (blue hydrogen, biorefining) to come online...that's the closest you'll get to a just transition for this site."

Now industrialists are belatedly speaking out in defence of Grangemouth. It was reported on 6 October that Scottish Gulfsands Petroleum CEO and former Grangemouth apprentice John Bell has called on the government to save a vital national asset, pointing out the increase in Britain's carbon footprint from importing oil.

Petroineos claimed 400 to 500 direct jobs would be lost: this was the figure accepted by net zero fanatics to bolster their closure schemes. Now accountancy firm PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates over 2,800 jobs will be impacted. John Bell thinks that even that is an underestimate. He calls for an urgent review and a "proper transition" in view of Britain's vulnerability on energy security.

"Something seems wrong", he said, "when 80 per cent of North Sea oil is exported while...less than 20 per cent of Grangemouth's feedstock has come from the UK – over 50 per cent less than 10 years ago." He wants the government to subsidise North Sea crude to ensure it is refined locally.

Saudi and Australian recruiting agents are rumoured to have been sniffing around

'The refinery, says the commission, does not define the Grangemouth economy. Tell that to the community...'

Grangemouth and Port Talbot. If jobs cannot be kept open nor a genuine career path found beyond oil and steel, these highly skilled workers will not be around to deliver any sort of transition.

Now is the time for unions to shout louder and move quickly. Unite's pre-election call – *No Ban Without a Plan* – was endorsed by the TUC, but politely ignored by the new government. Labour under Starmer is on the back foot. There may yet be opportunities for workers to save essential parts of British industry and shape an independent national energy policy. ■

- See CPBML video of protests by Grangemouth workers on our X/Twitter feed.

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist's series of Zoom discussion meetings continues on Tuesday 5 November on mass immigration, and why it amounts to war on the working class All meeting details are published on What's On, page 5, in our eNewsletter, and at cpbml.org.uk/events.

M As well as our Zoom discussion meetings, we hold regular in-person public meetings, with one in Manchester on 30 November on immigration, class and nation (details on page 5), and 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

The Labour government's new water bill is a fraud. It will cost the industry. And nothing, either, about the blatant failure to

Clean water – a clear demand

THE WATER industry is a mess, laden with post-privatisation debt and failing spectacularly on environmental standards.

Various local and national groups have campaigned for clean water for several years, without yet forcing the industry to change. The new government faces further pressure with a March for Clean Water in London on Sunday 3 November.

In early September, environment secretary Steve Reed made big claims for the new Water (Special Measures) Bill. He said he would jail the chief executives of water companies who obstruct investigations into spillages, and would ban bonuses for the directors of companies which don't meet environmental, consumer and financial guidelines.

These measures sound dramatic, but don't seem to trouble water company CEOs. Feargal Sharkey, former musician and now fearless champion for clean water, observed, "All of these measures are already included in the existing laws, which could be enforced with vigour and enthusiasm."

Superfluous

Reed made much of a promised government review into how water companies operate – but definitively ruled out nationalisation. A review or more "awareness" of problems are superfluous. The scandalous state of the industry and what lies behind it is already well known.

Instead of relying on a government wedded to token gestures and ineffective regulators, workers need to take actions necessary to force solutions to the industry's problems.

Analysis by campaign group "We Own It" shows that over 30 per cent of the money collected from water bills goes to shareholders as dividends (11 per cent) and to servicing debts (20 per cent).

Thames Water, the largest of the water companies, provides a shocking example of greed and incompetence. It has run up £18 billion of debt; its cash reserves are due to run out by next May.

The industry regulator, Ofwat, has put Thames Water into a "special measures" regime. This does not mean customers' money will be invested in stopping sewage



Workers

Slogan by the seafront of a Sussex seaside town.

discharge into our rivers. Nor does it mean an end to paying huge dividends.

It means only that the company must regularly report on its spending programme, and must show improvements in its performance, its delivery of investments, and its balance sheet, in order to exit the regime.

The last point is crucial. If the company fails to raise new funds from new investors it could result in temporary nationalisation with most of its debts transferred to the state.

Thames and its ultimate owners don't accept Ofwat's criticism. Under pressure to reduce debt levels and to attract invest-

ment, they want Ofwat to agree increases to customer bills of over 50 per cent, more than the regulator was prepared to allow.

And to top that, the owners are pitching for a write-off of fines for major spillages before they will bail out the company. Rather than fix the problems that led to the fines, they are challenging the regulator to not let the company fail – or if it does so, to leave the taxpayer with the debts.

Thames continues to make dividend payments despite its debt. In March 2024 the company's board agreed to pay over £150 million in dividends – more than double its operating profit. The next day, its investors said that they would not inject

do nothing about the debt that continues to hamstring
to maintain minimum environmental standards...

demand



£500 million cash support previously pledged.

Ofwat was already looking at whether a dividend of £37 million in December 2023 broke regulatory rules. The line from Thames has been all along that it is not “paying dividends to external shareholders”, merely paying a dividend to another company in the group to help it pay its debts – and that is set to continue. This looks like Thames is daring the regulator to do its worst.

On 11 July, Ofwat agreed that the water companies could put up the bills of 16 million households by 22 per cent over the next five years. Chancellor of the

Exchequer Rachel Reeves called these rises “a bitter pill” for households, but said nothing about blocking them.

The government is helping water companies to increase consumer bills. These, and the resulting increased profits and dividends, will all happen quickly. The companies behind the privatised industry in England and Wales – 70 per cent of which are foreign-owned – will have their ill-gotten gains.

The promised new investment and improved standards will be more elusive. Increased water bills force the British people to bail out failed private finance.

‘Obscene’ dividends

Matt Staniek, founder of the Save Windermere campaign, said, “It’s very clear that the water industry is exploiting the captured bill payers of this country and regulators are allowing it. Instead of allowing water companies to unfairly increase bills, Ofwat should halt these obscene dividend payments to shareholders. Labour’s actions so far have been inadequate, despite campaigning heavily on this issue before the election. This is a scam and now Labour are the ones permitting it.”

Paul Jennings, from the Ver Valley Society, said, “The investors in the water industry have blindsided the regulators. Elaborate financial structures have allowed billions to leak out of the system. The regulators did not see it happening. Poor performance by them and government.”

The water companies were debt-free at privatisation by the Thatcher government over 30 years ago. Since then they have taken on over £60 billion of debt, while investors have taken out £85 billion in dividends and other payments. Water company executives have taken over £25 million in bonuses and incentives since 2019. Not investing is still profitable. Polluting still pays.

In 2018, Michael Gove estimated that between 2007 and 2016 the nine private water companies For England and Wales paid 95 per cent of their profits to shareholders. No government will stop the CEOs of companies from awarding themselves bonuses and dividends. Only popular control will do this. Nationalisation – taking the

‘Thames’s owners want fines for major spills to be written off before they will bail out the company...’

companies out of the control of capitalists interested only in profit – is part of the answer, but not the whole answer.

Scottish Water is a publicly owned company, but it isn’t free of sewage problems. Increased regulation is called for but that needs to be more effective – a reminder that nationalisation would only be a first step.

In August Thames, Yorkshire and Northumbrian Water were fined a total of £168 million for sewage discharges. And there have been many more. It should be clear by now that the regulatory regime is not helping to secure clean water in Britain.

Workers throughout the industry need to take the responsibility for improving their industry’s performance, as well as addressing immediate concerns. When workers avoid responsibility, disasters happen – as the Grenfell tragedy should have taught us all.

Water workers campaigned against privatisation of water in 1989, but they can’t now leave sorting out the industry to company CEOs or to Ofwat. They know that these bodies are not focused on doing a decent job.

Water workers themselves can speak out and help to resolve the interlinked issues of pollution, underinvestment and debt. Trade unions need to support all those taking responsibility for the good of their industry.

The March for Clean Water claims a wide variety of groups in support. But so far, neither the TUC nor any of the unions working in the industry, despite their concerns about infrastructure investment. ■

Struggle is under way to reverse decades of decline in culture to Birmingham and beyond, those who work in the arts are

Stand up for the arts!



Adam Gasson/PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo

September 2024: Musicians' Union members in the Welsh National Opera orchestra take part in industrial action ahead of a performance of *Rigoletto* at the Wales Millennium Centre.

CHRONIC CUTS to funding of all aspects of the arts have long been causing deep concern to those working in the creative industries. In recent months the response from workers has been to organise colourful and vigorous campaigns and protests which have successfully grabbed the public's attention.

There is a new confidence being shown by workers in the arts, following decades of government neglect of a sector that does not neatly fit into the capitalist model of market forces and profiteering.

And a clear marker of that confidence is the growth in membership of the trade unions representing those working in the

cultural fields.

For example, Musicians' Union membership – hovering around 30,000 for decades – has risen to over 35,000 in the past four years. Others, such as Equity (for workers in the performing arts), Bectu (for workers in broadcasting, entertainment, communications and theatre), and the Writers' Guild of Great Britain, are also increasing in strength.

The fairly recently formed Artists' Union England is growing. And its sister union, the Scottish Artists Union, is now part of the body of the Scottish Trades Union Congress.

The period of pandemic lockdowns

had been deemed to be the great shrinker of trade unions, especially in the field of entertainment – but in fact the opposite is the case. Also noteworthy is the regular coordination which is taking place between unions, including the Scottish Society of Playwrights, Prospect (which represents members in areas such as curation, conservation, and archaeology), the NUJ (journalists) and the Professional Footballers Association.

Fighting back

Despite this growing strength, the task of fighting back and reversing the trend of decline is still a daunting one. In his analy-

ture funding. From Cardiff to Nottingham, from Edinburgh e fighting for their future...

sis *The Damage Caused by a Decade of Arts Funding Cuts* written for the Musicians' Union, journalist Andrew Stewart uses as his starting point the coming into power of the coalition government in 2010 and the reduction in the overall budget for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport from £1.4 billion a year to £1.1 billion.

He traces the continuing downward trend of funding for the arts. It fell "in real terms by £178 million between 2010 and 2023. Arts Council England's budget was trimmed by around 30 per cent over the same period."

Stewart cites similar cuts in the devolved administrations. Creative Scotland had its budget cut by £6.6 million in 2023, and Arts Council for Wales by 21 per cent. The National Theatre of Wales and Mid Wales Opera were dropped from regular funding. Arts Council Northern Ireland lost from its arts grants "a staggering 63 per cent between 2010 and 2020".

Stewart concludes, "The statistics bear witness to the government's conscious choice to downgrade arts funding across the UK."

A major new report about arts funding, *The State of the Arts*, was produced by the Campaign for the Arts and the University of Warwick. This highlights the perilous state of many important parts of our cultural life.

Compared to government spending overall, especially military spending, the amounts being "saved" are small, but the damage is great. This becomes apparent when we look at the outcomes for organisations such as theatres, local arts centres, grassroots promoters, opera and dance companies and individuals from freelancers to full time contracted actors and orchestral players.

With the threats of more hardships on the horizon coming from the current government, campaigners are preparing to fight against continued decline in arts funding. In the campaigners' sights are also local authorities, which cut arts funding by around a third between 2010 and 2018 in England, Scotland and Wales. And since then many have implemented deeper cuts.

Arts education across Britain's schools and colleges has suffered too from savage cuts. (News, page 5). Adam Behr of

Newcastle University, writing for *The Conversation*, describes this as a false economy and criticises the false dichotomy between science and arts education.

The Campaign for the Arts pointed out in February this year, "The arts support local communities, the economy and all people to thrive. Local authorities are still the biggest public investors in culture and library services. But without action now to shore up their funding, arts access across the nation is critically at risk."

Protests grow

All around Britain there has been a strong upsurge of campaigning to reverse this decline. When Birmingham City Council declared itself effectively bankrupt in 2023, cuts of over £3 million hit the arts. A statement from Midlands TUC Creative and Leisure Industries Committee urged "all interested parties to come together and campaign against these cuts which will be devastating if they happen. We are ready to fight alongside you. Once we lose our cultural icons they are gone forever."

In the East Midlands, the Musicians' Union regional organiser Stephen Brown said, "We have been working with sister unions, campaign groups and Notts Trades Council to fight what can only be described as devastating cuts for the residents and creative sector of Nottingham."

Equity members at Welsh National Opera have temporarily paused their strike action against cuts. But they will go ahead on 15 November if the company tries to implement its proposed 15 per cent pay cut, reduction of contracted hours and job losses.

In September, 93 per cent of the WNO chorus singers voted for industrial action over the proposed changes, including action short of a strike. All of the 30-strong chorus are Equity members and every single one took part in the ballot. Their protests outside the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff in October drew national attention to their dispute.

A vigorous campaign by Equity and the Musicians' Union helped to overturn the Scottish administration's cuts to freelancers' funding. But uncertainty over other cuts and future funding is putting many arts companies in jeopardy.

'Compared to government spending overall... the amounts being "saved" are small, but the damage is great...'

On 5 September there was a celebratory protest at the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh with pledges to continue the campaign. This followed onstage protests by casts at several theatre performances in the Edinburgh Festival in August.

Britain's theatres are at risk. There's an urgent need for £30 million to carry out crucial repairs. Work is especially needed at the Theatre Royal in Plymouth, The Lowry in Salford and the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough among others.

In Dundee, Liam Sinclair, director of the city's Repertory Theatre, stated that the uncertainty of Creative Scotland funding "severely affects our ability to plan for even the immediate future and poses a direct threat to our financial stability."

Around £300 million is needed for an ongoing plan for the theatre sector. This is highlighted by the Society of London Theatre and UK Theatre in a submission to the Treasury, ahead of the Budget on 30 October.

Library closures

In another aspect of cultural vandalism, cuts to library services are ongoing. For example in Aberdeen the SNP council closed six libraries, prompting a vigorous reaction.

The Library Campaign has been active in fighting against library closures in Nottingham and Birmingham and can be contacted at librarycampaign.com. The Save Nottingham Libraries campaign was launched in 2022. The Save Birmingham Campaign took on board the saving of 25 of the city's libraries. ■

Revived for a limited season, Stephano Massini's play about Lehman Brothers shows how capitalism consumes even its

No escape from boom a

sachab via Flickr. CC BY 2.0



Lehman Brothers offices in New York before the crash.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE has revived its production of *The Lehman Trilogy* for a limited run. This award-winning play illustrates what Marx and Lenin taught us – that the accumulation of capital and its expansion into an imperialist financial system leads to crisis upon crisis, boom and bust, until even capitalists like the Lehman Brothers can't survive.

This whole sorry saga – a tour de force in three acts – is played out by only three extraordinarily versatile actors, against a skyline, first of Montgomery, Alabama, then of Manhattan. Their stage is a box-like structure and the colour scheme black and white, as in old photographs and cinematography. Cardboard boxes remain piled up on stage throughout, a poignant symbol of the boxes used by Lehman office workers as they were forced to clear their desks.

Dominoes

Banks collapse like dominoes. Failure is built into the system, which encourages risk taking and exploitation of the poor. Lending for investment purposes based on

useful production is replaced by the selling of toxic bundles of debt, of no value to people or nations.

Lehmans forgot its origins in enabling investment and simply followed the money. The timing of this revival seems right, with politicians of all hues still blaming the banking disaster of 2008 for their own inability to manage the economy.

With war in the Middle East, there is also urgent need to combat a particular kind of antisemitism, which conflates capitalism and banking with Jewishness, and Jewishness with the Israeli state. The play indirectly invites questions about these matters, as it charts the development of the USA and the fluctuations of capitalism from the 19th century to the present day.

Early parts of the dialogue are interspersed with exclamations in Yiddish, to remind us of the humble origins of a typical exiled family, seeking to prosper in new lands and to retain their traditional values in the face of the mounting temptation of the money markets.

The Lehmans were German-Jewish immigrants from rural Bavaria in 1844. They

start out in a small way as general store owners and itinerant salesmen in Alabama, where cotton is king, becoming "Lehman Brothers" in 1850. They start to trade in raw cotton and soon experience the first of many widespread panics caused by a collapse of the financial system.

After the bloody Civil War (1861-1865) and Emancipation they emerge stronger and become a bank, aiding Reconstruction in Alabama. In 1869, by now in New York, convenient for the sea routes to the cotton mills of Lancashire, they diversify from agricultural into industrial interests.

Panic takes hold again in 1873 as the stock markets collapse. The Lehmans diversify to survive and by 1880 are found dealing in coffee and oil. In 1884 they start investing in steel and railways. As World War One looms, the US establishes the Federal Reserve, its central bank.

Postwar

Postwar, a new generation becomes interested in financing emerging industries geared towards mass consumption, such as airlines, automobiles, motion pictures and cigarettes. Undeterred by Protestant east coast prejudice and rejection, they diversify into launching retail companies too.

In 1929 the Lehman Corporation, an investment company, is created. It is the year of the Wall Street crash, followed by the Great Depression, with millions unemployed. By an incredible stroke of luck, the millions of dollars received from the trust's shareholders had not yet been invested back into the stock market.

Added to that, someone from outside the family was brought in – John D Hertz of car rental fame. His capital from selling his Yellow Cab Company to General Motors was the boost Lehmans needed to help weather the crash. Herbert Lehman diversifies into politics, supporting Roosevelt's New Deal and controls on bank speculation. He says: "Grabbing and greed can go on for just so long, but the breaking point is bound to come sometime."

The family ride out World War Two, but in 1965 a reckless younger generation turns to the latest grand commodity – money – divorced entirely from the production of

the rise and fall of
own...

and bust

**‘The whole edifice
of loans came to a
head in 2008,
precipitating a
financial crash...’**

goods. The 1980s, the Reagan years, are driven by market deregulation. Investment banks become primarily concerned with financial services.

Still named Lehman Brothers, the bank is acquired by American Express, which discards it in 1994. Meanwhile the oil crisis due to the Gulf Wars has sent the markets into a tailspin. The stock exchange is now digitised and incomprehensible to older members of the firm.

Lehman’s offices are destroyed in the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, but in 2002 the company acquires ambitious new global headquarters in Manhattan. Lehman Brothers entered the subprime lending market early – a hugely profitable business creating mortgages bundled into “junk” bonds. But many borrowers were unable to pay. The whole edifice came to a head in 2008, precipitating a financial crash.

The rest is history – Lehman’s quickly bankrupt, billions of dollars wiped out, stock markets around the world collapsed, and the worst financial slump since the Depression, threatening entire nations. Capitalism was put on life support – bailouts, “quantitative easing” (printing money) – for which workers are paying to this day.

This production of *The Lehman Trilogy* by Stefano Massini, adapted by Ben Power, is playing for a limited season until 5 January 2025) at the Gillian Lynne Theatre in London. ■

• Further reading: Peter Chapman, *The Last of the Imperious Rich: Lehman Brothers 1844-2008*, published by Portfolio in 2010 and still available.

WORKERS

WWW.CPBML.ORG.UK

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2024 £1



JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

IF YOU WANT PROGRESS, PREPARE FOR STRUGGLE!

Immigration	Class, nation	Higher ed	Who for?
Public services	The decline	Ukraine	No escalation!
Energy	What Britain needs	NHS	Pay imposed
New govt	Same problems	plus	Historic Notes,
Comedy	Unleashed in Manc	News and more	

TAKE CONTROL: BUILD THE NEW BRITAIN

TAKE OUT A SUBSCRIPTION TODAY

Workers is the journal of the CPBML, written by workers for workers.

No one is employed to write, edit and design it. It is the product of the labour, thought and commitment of Party comrades and friends who see the need to produce an independent, working-class, communist magazine in and for Britain in the 21st century.

Every two months Workers covers the issues of the day: measured, analytical, and clear – and deeply committed to the interests of Britain and the British working class.

Subscribe either online or by post for just £15 for a year’s issues delivered to your address. (These rates apply to UK subscriptions only – please email info@cpbml.org.uk for overseas rates.) Go online at cpbml.org.uk/subscribe, or for postal applications send a cheque (payable to CPBML-Workers) for £15 to Workers, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB. UK only.

In the Middle East, as elsewhere, the British ruling class sought to justify its interference in other peoples' countries by blaming them for the troubles.

1920–1948: Mandate and

BRITAIN OCCUPIED Palestine from 1923 in the aftermath of World War One and the carve up of the Ottoman Empire by imperialist powers – the League of Nations Mandate.

But, as Albert Einstein told an Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry on Palestine in 1946, “It was the British presence that perpetuated the troubles, not, as received opinion had it, the troubles that perpetuated the need for a British presence.”

In February and March 1936, Britain's Parliament rejected a legislative council of Palestine. The Palestinian people responded with a general strike, demanding a national government. In September, the British government sent more troops and then imposed martial law. The Palestinian people rebelled. By the end, over 5,000 Arabs had been killed and 14,000 wounded. 101 British troops and 463 Jews had been killed.

National liberation

The British aim was to use the Zionist movement to break the Palestinian people's national liberation struggle. The Zionists soon became unwilling to serve Britain's imperial interests. They too sought to create a state, a struggle that also undermined the British Empire. Britain's rulers opposed the creation of either an Arab or a Jewish state in Palestine. They wanted to stay as long as possible, to keep their military bases there, and to keep control of the country's oil interests in the Middle East.

‘The British state promised independence to the people of Palestine, but instead helped their dispossession and exile...’

In 1947, Attlee's government, overstretched financially and strategically, had to pull out its 100,000 troops, leaving the US government to dominate the region. The Zionists received strong backing from the US government. Their forces seized 80 per cent of Palestine, including half the land allotted by international agreement to the Arabs, forcibly evicting 800,000 people.

Connived

The British state connived at the Israeli onslaught. It had promised independence to the people of Palestine, but instead helped their dispossession and exile. The colonisation of Palestine was a disaster for the Palestinians. It was no consolation that their national liberation struggle effectively broke British power in the Middle East.

In July 1956, the US government unilaterally reneged on its agreement to lend Egypt the money to build the Aswan Dam. The British government tamely followed suit. Egypt replied by nationalising the Suez Canal Company to raise the funds, as allowed in international law.

British Prime Minister Anthony Eden tabled unacceptable motions at the United Nations to produce deadlock. He then claimed that there was no choice but war.

On 29 October, Israeli forces attacked Egypt. The next day, British and French forces invaded Egypt, and demanded that the Egyptians and the Israelis withdraw from the canal. They were ordering the Egyptians to withdraw from their own territory, while allowing Israeli invasion forces to remain ninety miles inside Egypt. The Egyptians refused to withdraw. Eden then ordered the RAF to bomb Egypt's airfields.

The British government used its veto at the UN, for the first time, to block a Security Council Resolution demanding that Israel withdraw its troops.

Cease-fire

In November a demonstration in Trafalgar Square against the war was so huge that it spilled down Whitehall and filled all the streets leading off it. As a result of the opposition, the Cabinet forced Eden to call a cease-fire. The “mad imperialist gamble” (in the words of the foreign affairs' minister, Anthony Nutting, who then resigned) was



Everett Collection Historical/Alamy Stock Photo

1938, Bethlehem, Palestine: Arab youths with sticks, banners and post office.

over 1,500 Egyptians were killed and wounded. Four British and five French soldiers were killed.

British and French forces were ousted at once, Israel's four months later. The war destroyed the British Empire's position in the Middle East and strengthened Egypt's independence, the results it was intended to prevent.

On 4 June 1967, the Israeli government, knowing it had the backing of the US and British governments, decided to attack Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Menachem Begin, who fought the British in the 1940s and later became prime minister admitted, “The Egyptian Army concentrations in the Sinai do not prove that Nasser was really about to attack us... We decided to attack him.”

Israeli forces invaded Syria and seized the Golan Heights – after Syria had accepted a ceasefire. Israeli forces seized land from Egypt and Jordan too.

On 22 November 1967, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 242

sought to justify its
for any troubles...

misrule



s and clubs cheering the burning of the police

demanding as the prime condition for peace that Israel withdraw from occupied Arab lands. It never has.

The Palestinians have long recognised Israel's right "to exist in peace and security", but Israeli governments have always refused to reciprocate.

The peoples of Israel and Palestine have to work out how to achieve the necessary settlement, on their own, rebuffing the outside interference that has for so long held back progress towards peace. That is the only way to end a war in which too many politicians on both sides appear to want to destroy the other people entirely.

US and British interventions have inflamed, not resolved, the conflict. Outside attempts to achieve a solution to war by backing one people against another will always fail. We must press that Britain not be involved in wars abroad, that our people are not divided into factions clashing over foreign wars, and that we unite to focus on Britain. ■



Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.

ABOUT US

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Want to know more? Interested in joining or just in taking part? Get in touch by phone or email. If you want to know more, visit cpbml.org.uk/foundations, come along to our next online or in-person discussion group, or join a study group.

Sign up for our free email newsletter – the sign up button is on the right-hand side of our pages at cpbml.org.uk.

Subscribe to *Workers*, our bimonthly magazine, either on line at cpbml.org.uk or by sending £15 for a year's issues (cheques payable to CPBML-Workers) to the address below. UK only. Email for overseas rates.

CPBML

78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB

email info@cpbml.org.uk

twitter [@cpbml](https://twitter.com/cpbml)

www.cpbml.org.uk

phone 07308 979308



Change the climate of debate

‘The economic ills we face are endemic to capitalism, and not because too much is spent on public services or paying workers in line with inflation...’

THE NEW government has shown that all parliamentary parties are essentially the same in their attitude to British workers. This is underlined by the government’s cowardly attack on the living standards of the more vulnerable section of our class.

The removal of the winter fuel allowance, one of the “tough decisions” the government says it has had to make, is the most obvious example. It claims to have discovered a £22 billion hole in the nation’s accounts – a fig leaf for its fiscal policies.

In truth this government, like all its predecessors, is in slavish subservience to the needs of finance capital – the financial markets that they worship and believe are sacrosanct. Yet the global capitalist firms and their owners are immune from tough decisions – “private profit, public loss” is their rule.

Starmer’s government has abandoned even any lip service to socialism. It has shown itself to be no more competent than the last government. For example, it has shown no sign it is able to meet the requirements of creating a healthy environment – exemplified by the ongoing fight for unpolluted rivers and coasts and clean water supplies.

There are many other important demands including efficient transport and a reliable energy supply. Labour prefers to fixate on achieving even more stringent net zero targets – unlikely to be achievable, costing a fortune and trashing British industry in the process.

Starmer and Lammy strut around on the international stage, promoting war in Ukraine and full support for US foreign policy in the Middle East. The nation’s coffers are to spend billions on military aid, with a promise to continue – “for as long as it takes” in the case of Ukraine.

But there’s no similar commitment when it comes to attending to the urgent national needs of health care, education, jobs, food security, housing, border security and so on. These are issues that most concern our class – but we are told what we need is not affordable.

Starmer and Reeves repeat the tired old refrain: “We’ve inherited a mess from the previous government.” Do they really think

British people are that stupid? The economic ills we face are endemic to capitalism, and not because too much is spent on public services or paying workers in line with inflation.

The role claimed for finance capital is that it is a catalyst for industrial development and growth. The truth is the opposite: it sucks money away from investment in useful production and puts it back to work to create even more capital – as well as enriching the already obscenely wealthy.

The Blair Labour government massively ramped up the Private Finance Initiative, introduced by its Conservative predecessors. Gordon Brown, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, touted this as the answer to decades of Tory underinvestment. It didn’t quite turn out like that and we (British taxpayers) are still paying the price. PFI repayments to “investors” are expected to be over £10 billion this year.

Reeves and Starmer don’t mention that. Yet in their vanity they are heading down the same route with the International Investment Summit held in mid-October. Touting Britain to international finance in return for not very much.

The Starmer government postures as the champion of working-class interests. It claims, falsely, that it alone was responsible for the recent awards on pay and conditions. But it was the workers in those disputes who achieved this. Their claims had already been agreed and settled by the previous government after prolonged and bitter struggles.

Workers have no need of self-appointed champions or for anyone to speak on our behalf. Emancipation of the working class from the dictatorship of finance capital and its lackeys is the work of the working class itself.

All this has left many who voted for the self-styled “party of change” bitterly disappointed – and that disillusion has come rapidly indeed. For those in Britain who said this would be the case, there is no satisfaction in being proved correct. What we must do is to honestly explain to our fellow workers that this cycle of false hope and disappointment cannot go on for ever. We have to change the climate of debate in our class. ■

Subscriptions

Take a regular copy of the bimonthly full-colour WORKERS. Six issues (one year) delivered direct to you costs £15 including postage and packing.

Subscribe online at cpbml.org.uk/subscribe, or by post (send a cheque payable to “CPBML-Workers”, along with your name and address to WORKERS, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB).

Name

Address

Postcode

BADGES OF PRIDE

Get your full-colour badges celebrating May Day (2 cm wide, enamelled in black, red, gold and blue) and the Red Flag (1.2 cm wide, enamelled in Red and Gold).

The badges are available now. Buy them online at cpbml.org.uk/shop or by post from Bellman Books, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB, price £2 for the May Day badge and £1 for the Red Flag badge. Postage free up to 5 badges. For orders over 5 please add £1 for postage (make cheques payable to “CPBML-Workers”).

WEAR THEM – SHARE THEM



May Day badge, £2



Red Flag badge, £1