

WORKERS

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THE FUTURE IS IN OUR HANDS

Capitalism Borrowed time **Energy** Focus on Drax
Migration Records broken **Food** Insecurity rules
London Seize control **Scotland** Strikes grow
Rail Unions dig in *plus* Historic Notes,
Unions Honest thinking News and more

WORKERS



Living on borrowed time

ANOTHER MONTH, another prime minister. All this change! And yet underneath nothing has changed at all. British capitalism, the oldest in the world and arguably the most cunning, is out of ideas and out of time. It simply has nowhere to go.

For more than a decade now, capitalism has been living on borrowed time. The financial crash of 2008, the result of wild speculation in a desperate attempt to escape the consequences of the falling rate of profit, dug a huge pit for it.

The solution – throughout the capitalist world – was to borrow money on a hitherto unimaginable scale to keep the economy running. But as any worker knows, you can't borrow money forever: sooner or later the bill must be paid.

Twist and turn as they try, they cannot provide security and stability for workers or indeed for businesses. That really is the minimum people want from a government, but with capitalism in decline and crisis it's too much to expect. Far too much.

The ill-fated Liz Truss reacted to crisis by throwing her hands in the air and handing over the future of the country to "the markets". Well, maybe that's more honest than thinking that all we need is a "safe pair of hands".

The idea that all will be fine with a sensible Chancellor, whether Conservative or Labour, is ludicrous. Debts must be paid, and workers will be made to pay them through taxes and spending cuts – for the capitalists, there is no other plan.

The situation is crying out for a revolution. One element of a revolutionary situation is already in place: the ruling class is unable to rule in the old way. Indeed, if ruling is to be anything other than raw oppression and the use of state power, it is unable to rule at all. Actually running a country is beyond it.

It is the other half of the equation that is missing. The working class has yet to declare it will not be ruled in the old way, that it will seize control for itself.

Surging opinion poll leads for the Labour Party suggest that workers are still looking for someone else to do the job, even though common sense and a moment's reflection must lead to the conclusion that Labour is not up to anything.

Anyway, recent events show beyond doubt that it is finance capital that dictates how we are governed, not the parliamentary parties. Switching Sunak for Starmer will not solve anything. They promise only to manage further decline. As if it could be "managed"!

Real politics is a lot deeper than shouting "Tories Out!". There is only one solution: "Workers in!" We are not there yet, but there are encouraging signs of a renaissance of honest thinking in Britain (see page 24), centred on fighting for power, for control.

The struggle that matters is the one that builds power and confidence in workplaces and communities, grows and extends control over our own working class organisations, and leads to control over the country. Real control for real independence. ■



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Workers

Pickets and supporters outside Glasgow Central station in July.

RMT digs in for long battle

THE RAIL DISPUTES are now nearly six months old, and railway workers and their unions – led by RMT – are now resigned to a long-drawn-out campaign as they fight for the future of their jobs and their industry, and endeavour to force employers to maintain the buying power of their wages. Many have had no pay increase for years.

The rail unions know that all-out strikes would not be wise. Instead they are keeping up a steady campaign of disruption through one-day strikes that keep the pot boiling. Called at a frequency that minimises the financial hit borne by the striking workers, this also minimises the fall-off in passenger numbers.

Meanwhile, the RMT has been forced by the anti-trade union laws to re-ballot the large number of members for whom the initial ballot in favour of strikes expires on 23 November. That re-ballot closes on 15 November. The other unions are expected to re-ballot shortly.

Given what the employers are seeking, the turnout and the majorities in favour of strikes could be even bigger than before. The proposals so far put to unions include slashing pay, ending collective bargaining, forcing staff to work where and when the employer dictates including Sundays, closing nearly all ticket offices, and effectively abolishing the role of the guard on the train.

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

DAIRY PRODUCTS

Drivers strike

AROUND 70 HGV drivers and shunters at Muller's Stonehouse factory in Gloucestershire are to escalate their dispute over imposed rota changes with 11 days of all-out action from 19 to 29 October.

The employer is insisting they work at least one day every weekend, in breach of an agreement with Unite. The action will hit deliveries of dairy products to Waitrose, Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's and Tesco. ■

BARRISTERS

Offer accepted

CRIMINAL BARRISTERS voted in October to accept an improved pay offer from the government, and ended industrial action which had closed courts around the country.

Crucially, the government will apply the 15 per cent pay increase it had already offered to cases that are in progress. Announcing the ballot result, the Criminal Bar Association said, "The criminal justice system sits on a knife edge." ■

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



Workers



Crowds at the Enough is Enough demonstration in Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester, on 1 October, one of many held throughout Britain.

ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at cpbml.org.uk

University staff vote for UK-wide strike action in historic ballot

The University and College Union has announced that over 70,000 university staff at 150 universities could strike after an overwhelming Yes vote for strike action in what it calls “two historic national ballots”.

Nurses: a call to arms

Nurses are considering industrial action on pay. It is time for those of us outside the NHS to stop clapping and hear the call to arms.

FE lecturers launch wave of strikes over pay

Thousands of lecturers at further education colleges in England continue their strikes in a battle over pay in the biggest action ever taken by FE workers.

Rolls-Royce workers move towards action on pay

Unions at aerospace and defence company Rolls-Royce are to ballot for industrial action after talks on pay broke down at the beginning of September.

Carelessness and contempt

The government’s contempt towards its two main domestic creditors – the pension funds and the Bank of England nearly brought about a new, devastating collapse.

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.

Redundancy blow at Meggitt

WORKERS AT the Coventry factory of specialist engineering firm Parker Meggitt found out in mid-October that around 200 jobs will go by the end of the year. This comes only weeks after the takeover of Meggitt plc by US group Parker-Hannifin.

Meggitt is a leading manufacturer of components for the aerospace and defence industries. The £6 billion takeover last year by its US competitor fuelled concerns from trade unions and others about job and skills losses. Parker agreed to maintain the Coventry headquarters and to retain research and development, product engineering and direct manufacturing in Britain.

The government carried out consultations on national security and competition in the light of undertakings from Parker. Just seven days after the consultation ended on 13 July, Kwasi Kwarteng, the Business Secretary at the time, waved through completion of the deal.

These job losses come despite the company opening a new site in June at Ansty, near Coventry, employing around 1,000 people. Parker Meggitt UK said on 13 October that, “After the combination of the two businesses in September, some of the work previously undertaken by Meggitt’s corporate central functions, predominantly in the UK and USA, may no longer be required.”

Parker’s voluntary undertakings never excluded the jobs now under threat in corporate and support departments. But cuts in such areas often lead to others, especially after mergers. Workers fear this is just the start of redundancies in the British-based operations.

Unite and other unions have fought foreign takeovers in the defence industry on the slogan “Spend UK defence £ in UK”. The government did not defend Meggitt workers. They will have to do that for themselves.

DEFENCE

Priority call

UNITE, one of the main unions in the defence sector, has called on the government to prioritise British jobs and industries when tendering for defence contracts.

Speaking at the TUC in Brighton on 19 October, Unite assistant general secretary Steve Turner said British taxpayers’ money has supported jobs in the US for too long – our government should be investing in jobs and communities in Britain.

He pointed out that, for example, “It doesn’t require an increase in defence spending to ensure that our naval support ships are built here with UK steel and composites, cabling and technologies, in shipyards from Appledore to Belfast, Birkenhead to Rosyth.” Commitment to the

Dreadnought, Lynx and Tempest programmes would support thousands of skilled, unionised jobs across the country.

On the same day two trade unions, Unite and Prospect, announced that workers at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) would be balloted for industrial action over pay. AWE is responsible for maintaining Britain’s nuclear weapons.

AWE has recently changed status, supposedly becoming free of direct public sector pay restriction as an arm’s length agency of the Ministry of Defence. But even so it made a below inflation pay offer, “sweetened” by a one-off lump sum.

Prospect said that the offer made by AWE was inadequate and warned that workers in this highly complex sector could not easily be replaced. There are already issues with recruitment and retention, which will only become worse.

DOCKS

Liverpool walkouts

NEARLY 600 workers at the Port of Liverpool decided to walk out from 24 October to 7 November over pay and job security. They also walked out between 11 and 17 October.

Against a backdrop of plummeting container volumes, the operator Peel Ports

Group have offered a real-terms wage cut, issuing misleading information about a deal to the press. They have issued redundancy notices to 132 workers. Senior staff have joined the walkouts.

Unite says the employer MDHC (Mersey Docks and Harbour Company), part of Peel Ports, recently reported a record profit of £141 million, exceeding the wage bill for the year. More than £300 million in dividends has been paid in the past five years. ■



Matt Preston (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Belgrave Road, Leicester, here lit up for Diwali, was the site of some of the worst rioting.

Imported politics spark riots

VIOLENCE BROKE out in Leicester in September. This is the unwelcome result of Indian sub-continent politics coming to Britain – in a city where immigrants have settled and lived for decades, for the most part peacefully.

The religious and ethnic riots between Muslims and Hindus were triggered after the cricket match between Pakistan and India played in Dubai on 28 August, but had little to do with it. Over the following weeks the incidents escalated, both in the degree of violence and the extremity of the slogans.

Exaggerations and distortions spread through social media, much of it originating outside Britain, particularly from India, playing on existing tensions. The losers were the people of Leicester and Smethwick, where related violence broke out as well.

Media reports showing people influenced by Hindutva, an extremist political ideology based in India, were active in the events. Many of those arrested for intimidating and attacking Muslims came from outside Leicester. Almost inevitably some Muslims attacked Hindus in retaliation. Muslim fundamentalists took over an originally peaceful protest outside Durga Bhavan Hindu Centre in Smethwick, calling for intimidation and more threats. Fortunately, religious leaders and others called for calm and dialogue on both sides.

Unhelpfully, both the Indian and Pakistani governments weighed in with sectarian statements. These countries are filled with feudal baggage and should not be spreading it into other sovereign nations.

Ethnic or religious ghettos have no place here. They feed on separatism and a lack of integration. But this is not only about foreign intervention.

Suella Braverman, then Home Secretary, blamed the riots on uncontrolled immigration and a lack of integration. Such views are shouted down by so-called liberals who espouse multiculturalism and call anyone racist for raising real problems of migration – or anyone who voted to leave the EU – and in so doing perpetuate and support division.

At least some people in Leicester are not buying that line. A local council by-election on 13 October saw a huge swing away from Labour. Its candidate was seen as partisan and was defeated by a Conservative – despite the ongoing crisis for the government. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

NOVEMBER

Tuesday 8 November, 7pm

Online discussion meeting (via Zoom)

“Energy independence”

With energy bills soaring and permanent uncertainty about supply, Britain's increasing energy dependence on imported fuel and carbon-free electricity is proving costly and dangerous. What's the way forward? Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation.

JANUARY

Tuesday 10 January, 7pm

Online discussion meeting (via Zoom)

“Is Brexit done?”

Six years after the vote to leave the European Union, is the United Kingdom really free of its clutches? How much EU control remains, and can we trust government to see the vote through? 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).

BIOMASS

EU blow to forests

ON 13 SEPTEMBER, the European Parliament voted to keep the definition of woody biomass as renewable energy. The EU will remain the world's largest consumer of wood pellets. In 2021, it produced nearly 20 million tonnes of wood pellets itself, while importing another 3.7 million tonnes, mostly from the USA. US shipments of pellets to EU member states have soared with the energy crisis.

The EU decision will hasten the destruction of forests in Europe and North America. It lets logging companies carry on destroying forests, adding carbon to the atmosphere. Forests in Finland and Estonia, once key assets for reducing carbon from the air, are now net carbon emitters.

Forests degraded by clear-cutting are more flammable, as shown by the fires across Europe in the summer. Bad forest management, driven by profit, was responsible. ■

• See feature article on Drax, page 8.

The never-ending rise in the number of people migrating to Britain is being hollowed out from within, including by people who are

Why is immigration at record levels?



Sean Aicdan Calderbank/shutterstock.com

September 2022: Migrants rescued by Border Force are brought ashore at Dover. This summer has seen record numbers trying to make the Channel Crossing – but the numbers are dwarfed by the legal immigration being encouraged by the government.

IT WAS LATE August, and the Conservative party leadership election was approaching its climax. Blink and you could have missed the release of official statistics showing that in the year to June 2022 a record number of visas – a total of 1.1 million – had been issued to people to live in Britain.

And that, as an article in the *Daily Telegraph* pointed out, is an astonishing 70 per cent higher than at the time of the general election of 2019, where the winners pledged to bring immigration under control.

Instead, we have had home secretaries like Priti Patel grandstanding over illegal immigration while issuing legal visas hand over fist.

Some things never change. Every government this century has been addicted to migration, including Labour (see Box). Britain, they say, lacks skilled workers – or for that matter unskilled workers – and the

only solution is to import them.

Whether that was true or not, importing labour on a large scale has always gone down well with the employers, because it saves them having to train people and as importantly tends to lower wage rates as well.

In the year ending June 2021 – Covid-19 notwithstanding – net migration into Britain was 239,000. That's higher than it was in 2015, the year that the decision was taken to hold a referendum on membership of the EU.

No cap

During her campaign for the Conservative Party leadership, Liz Truss was a little coy about migration. She made some commitments to address illegal immigration but explicitly rejected a cap on legal migration.

In office as prime minister, Truss went of her way to increase the number of legal

migration routes into Britain. She is, of course, a paid-up member of the global finance capital supporters club. She and her fellow free-market fanatics see any restriction on the free flow of capital and labour as an abomination (which is probably why she voted to stay in the EU).

Truss, of course, has now gone. But don't expect much in the way of change from Rishi Sunak.

'Truss has now gone, but don't expect much in the way of change from Sunak...'

o Britain provides the clearest evidence that Brexit is
appeared to be in favour of it...

Record levels?

Many in the Conservative Party were happy to allude to the problems of the free movement of labour during the 2016 referendum campaign. What they kept silent was their belief that it was wrong to restrict free movement just to the European Union. They see the whole world as a reserve army of workers.

So, for example, the tide of doctors emigrating from sub-Saharan Africa has swelled, creating a brain drain that African countries can ill afford. Press coverage in Nigeria, for example, details how 233 Nigerian doctors moved to Britain in 2015. The figure for 2021 is four times as high, according to Uche Rowland, president of the Nigerian Medical Association.

Meanwhile, Nigeria has a ratio of one doctor to every four or five thousand patients, according to the registrar of the country's Medical and Dental Council. The official World Health Organization guideline is one to 600.

Precarious

Overall, according to a report from the UK General Medical Council published in October, more doctors trained abroad are now joining the NHS than doctors trained here. This reliance on doctors from overseas "put healthcare systems in a precarious position", it says.

That's a reference to Britain's healthcare systems. What the report fails to address is the damage inflicted on the healthcare systems of other countries.

Doctors are planning to ballot in January next year for industrial action on their call for salaries to be restored to match those of 2008 in real terms. According to the British Medical Association, doctors' salaries have slumped in real terms by over a quarter – 26.1 per cent.

How has the NHS managed to maintain numbers in the face of such a deterioration in pay? Some will seek to deny it, but a large part of the reason lies in the wholesale importation of medical staff from countries with lower wages.

Still more seek to deny the impact of what is in effect the free movement of medical staff into Britain from any country in the world. The shocking statistics from Nigeria

Labour opened the doors wide

BEFORE THE Labour government under Tony Blair, immigration from the EU was substantial, but not overwhelming. That all changed in 2004, when Jack Straw at the Home Office opened the door to migrants from ten new EU members including Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and the Baltic states.

Significantly, almost all the other countries in the EU decided to exercise their right to delay free movement from the ten new member states for up to seven years. Labour decided to open the doors at once. Straw later told the *Lancashire Telegraph*, "...we thought that it would be good for Britain if these folk could come and work here from 2004."

That decision, taken outside parliament, was based on a confidential paper

written by the Home Office itself. Full of impressive tables and opaque equations, it predicted – with the usual caveats – immigration from the ten new states of between 4,872 and 12,568 a year.

The predictions were so far out that in retrospect it seems the paper was written on another planet. In 2015, another study from University College London and written for the OECD found that 129,000 entered Britain from the new EU members in 2005 and 2006 alone. In 2007 the annual figure leapt again, to 112,000 in one year.

That's just going by official figures. When Britain voted to leave the EU in 2016 the official estimate was of 3.5 to 4 million EU citizens living in the country. As of June 2022, 6.7 million EU citizens have applied for settled status. ■

are echoed all across the developing world.

And not just the developing world. Central and eastern Europe are also being stripped of their medics. After Romania joined the EU, doctors flooded out of the country. In just three years, between 2011 and 2014, the number of doctors working in Romanian hospitals fell by a third, devastating services for the population left behind.

To get some idea of how keen the British establishment is to open borders ever wider, look at the sacking of Home Secretary Suella Braverman. Ostensibly this was about sending an email from her private account. In reality it was her opposition to more immigration from India as part of the free trade agreement negotiations.

Predictable

India reacted furiously – and predictably – because its principal demand in the negotiations is for so-called Mode 4 access for Indian companies. Mode 4, a term that came into being as part of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), would allow Indian companies to move staff to Britain under Indian terms for periods of up to three years. It could even

cover Indian self-employed workers providing services to Indian companies.

Crucially, Mode 4 applies to all sorts of workers – skilled and unskilled, specialised or not, in shortage occupations or not. So it tends to undercut any kind of nationally agreed immigration policy.

This is precisely what Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT union, told the TUC Congress in 2011 when he successfully moved a motion opposing a free trade agreement with India. Workers in Britain, he said, had suffered from work being outsourced to India. "Now the EU/India trade deal will allow the 'insourcing' of Indian workers and drive down wages even further," he said.

Part of Brexit, Braverman told *The Spectator*, "was actually about weaning employers off foreign labour". And she went on, "I have concerns about having an open borders migration policy with India because I don't think that's what people voted for with Brexit."

None of that should be controversial – most people in Britain would agree with her on that, whatever they think personally about Brexit or migration – but for the government it was a sacking offence. ■

Burning wood to generate electricity is no solution for Britain “net neutral” are flawed...

Drax – more at stake than

OPERATIONS AT THE huge Drax power station in North Yorkshire are under scrutiny once again. In early October, the BBC broadcast a *Panorama* documentary alleging that Drax was burning wood pellets from primary Canadian forests to generate electricity.

This doesn't look like an environmentally sustainable approach. Nor is it a sustainable source of Britain's energy.

It's worth looking behind how Drax became the flagship for biomass electricity generation. Drax, by far Britain's biggest power station, has converted two-thirds of its capacity from using coal to biomass, mostly imported wood pellets. It describes this as “renewable energy” from “sustainable” products, which attracts enormous financial subsidies.

Drax Group, a stock exchange quoted company, owns and runs the power station. It retorted that *Panorama* had it wrong. The wood was unusable for other applications, the forest was not primary, it had all the appropriate licenses in place and so on.

Challenged

Drax's ethical approach has been questioned before. The company, which has 13 sites in the US and Canada, was accused of exceeding limits on emissions of air pollutants. This September it agreed to pay over \$3 million to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to settle claims against two of its plants in the area. Drax denied liability but still paid up. Drax CEO Will Gardner said, “Sustainable biomass is increasingly being recognised by governments and scientists around the world as having the potential to play a critical role in tackling the climate crisis.”

‘What drives the biomass industry is not “care for the planet” but the huge subsidies...’



Claire Louise Jackson/shutterstock.com

The huge Drax station in Yorkshire, with the biomass storage facilities in the foreground.

But not everyone agrees with the company. Its claims are questionable according to a report from Resource, a media company specialising in the waste and recycling sector. And US environmental group the National Resources Defense Council says that the BBC documentary effectively challenged Drax's claims that it only used wood waste, which earlier investigations had also uncovered. This underlines the inadequacy of sustainability criteria used for biomass imports.

Older, primary forests store more carbon than commercially managed timber. And they are valuable as plant and animal habitats. But the debate about whether Drax is burning the right wood or the wrong wood or if it has licences is beside the point. Wood takes decades to grow, at a

minimum, but moments to burn.

The current demand for waste wood is outstripping supply, especially in Sweden and other northern European countries. Factor in that Drax has to ship biomass across the Atlantic, and the argument for sustainability and energy security melts like snow on the water.

What drives the growing biomass industry here, is not “care for the planet” but the huge subsidies it attracts, estimated to be of the order of £5.6 billion over the last decade. Drax alone received £893 million from the government in 2021.

The government's advisers the Climate Change Committee have long argued that biomass is essential to Britain's carbon zero future. They see subsidies as a means to encourage industry involvement. They

Britain's tenuous energy supply – and claims it is “carbon neutral” by burning wood



steamroller all attempts to make the case that importing biomass is not sustainable.

This August the government announced a consultation about boosting biomass energy generation, or rather it's already decided to increase it and is now asking how. The justification is that it will “improve the diversity of energy supply” in pursuit of net zero and commitments to the Paris Agreement.

Besides the dogma on net zero, a lack of strategic planning for energy supply and the electricity market pricing mechanism are the main problems for Britain. Importing more wood pellets and allowing fracking exploration again don't add up to a strategy.

Events since the Russian invasion of Ukraine have shown the risk of relying on imports – of materials to burn or electricity

via interconnectors. Energy security is not just another buzzword, but is essential for Britain – it can't be delegated elsewhere.

But many people would be surprised to know that in 2022 Britain is a net exporter of electricity, particularly to France. The reason is simple: generating companies can command a good price. And it's not just the surplus from renewable energy sources – this year to the end of October fossil fuel, almost all of it gas, accounts for 45 per cent of electricity generation.

The promises of “net zero”, or even “negative carbon”, are not only based on continuing subsidies, but also the expectation that carbon capture and sequestration (underground storage) can be effectively applied to burning biofuels. Drax claims that it is proven technology, but the detail shows there is much about it that's not yet certain. The promising projects it cites are not yet near the required scale.

Reliance on the market

The other factor in UN climate change targets is reliance on market mechanisms such as emissions trading and carbon credits. The crude underlying idea is that companies must pay to burn carbon-based fuel and so will then have an incentive to reduce output. As with any capitalist market, the aim is to make profits, but that does not guarantee the best long term technical solutions will emerge. In some cases it even has the opposite effect.

This year the price of gas has fluctuated wildly in response to events – not that the dips have found their way into our energy bills. And part of the overall rise is attributed to the EU emissions trading scheme. In September the EU proposed changes to “keep the price of carbon down” – by manipulating their own market mechanisms. According to industry analysts Carbon Market Watch, this action is likely to be self-defeating.

Britain left the EU trading scheme but now operates one that is very similar. Outcomes from these markets are not always clear; the claimed reduction in emissions are not necessarily attributable to the market mechanisms. All these schemes involve complex financial arrangements, with scope for nations and individual companies to manipulate them – as well as opportunities for outright fraud.

There's an incentive to shift production (and emissions) from countries that comply closely with the UN targets to those that don't. Which might explain, at least in part, why carbon emissions are down in Britain and comparable countries while they continue to increase worldwide.

British energy bill payers are forking out over £2.5 million a day to perpetuate this conceit. So long as we endure this unscientifically justified robbery without insisting on being consulted about our future, the vultures will continue to feast. And it's likely they won't be able to keep the lights on. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist's series of Zoom discussion meetings continues on Tuesday 8 November on the subject of energy independence. All meeting details are published on What's On, page 5, in our eNewsletter, and at cpbml.org.uk/events.

As well as our Zoom discussion meetings, we hold regular in-person public meetings, with the next one in the new year (details to be announced), as well as informal meetings with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further.

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

**Food shortages and rising food prices have hit Britain. It r
squandered the opportunities in front of them...**

Wake up to the causes o



HASPhotos/shutterstock.com

Display in Tesco, Rotherham, collecting for Trussell Trust food banks.

MANY YOUNG people would be surprised to know that before the year 2000 there were virtually no food banks in Britain. But government figures show that by July 2022 there were 1,400 Trussell Trust food banks in the country in addition to at least 1,172 independent ones.

And few would know that food banks were an American import. Companies like Walmart help their bottom line by donating to food banks; it enables them to sell more high-cost products and reduces food waste costs. All the main supermarkets in Britain now follow the same pattern.

The number of people using food banks is one measure of food insecurity; that number is likely to rise sharply. Food prices rose by 14.6 per cent in the 12 months to September 2022; this figure has risen for the last 14 consecutive months.

Food security is about more than access to food and household spending; it includes how resilient a nation is to food supply shocks. We discovered that to our cost in two world wars. Simply, the resilience depends on how much we are able to feed ourselves without relying on imports.

Opportunities

Compared with so many other countries Britain has a relatively benign climate, adequate rainfall (unevenly distributed) and a rich and continuing history of innovation. But it has a history of failing to take food security seriously; our governments have recently squandered two opportunities to put that right.

Food production in Britain was in decline for most of the period we were

members of the European Union. Leaving the EU and its common agricultural policy (CAP) was our biggest opportunity since the end of WW2 to address growing food insecurity. But six years later the government has no clear idea of how to replace the CAP.

In April 2022 *Workers* reported on the lack of clarity and coherence in the government's scheme for managing our land and food production. It had even failed to list

‘Leaving the EU was our biggest opportunity...’

need not have been that way – governments have

of food insecurity

food production as a public good. Yet everything was meant to be fully up and running by 2024.

In September Defra, the ministry responsible for agriculture, declared the whole scheme “under review”, raising widespread concerns. Nothing had changed by the end October. The suspicion is that the £2.4 billion promised (for England, since farming policy is devolved in Wales and Scotland) will become prey to the next round of public spending cuts.

Six years with no progress on agricultural policy is unforgivable – either post Brexit direct sabotage or incompetence. If previous generations of officials had moved as slowly then World War Two would have ended before food rationing would have had to begin, and Dig for Victory policies would have been implemented too late!

The delay is increasing pressure on farmland from developers. Jonathan Gorham, planning adviser for the National Farmers Union, pointed out that Britain has no target for increasing food self-sufficiency, but we do have targets for housing, energy installations and nature. And if they were all met, a quarter of England’s agricultural land would be lost!

The second opportunity to address food insecurity came in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. In the early stages there was genuine and urgent talk of food security and critical risks to food supply chains. Any concerns on the part of government were typically short lived.

Farming and fishing organisations, asked for their opinions and solutions at the time, now describe a lack of interest from Defra, and the shelving of work on potential solutions. If another pandemic were to strike soon – and medical advice is to think “when” not “if” – we will certainly begin from a less secure base than 2020.

War

The chief reason for the crisis in food prices is the war in Ukraine. War in Europe has become the key driver of food insecurity.

In December 2021, for the first time in 11 years, Britain produced a report on food security. There was no shortage of criticism about the way the report presented all its figures in the most optimistic light, but it

was significant that it was produced at all.

The headline claim was “About 54 per cent of food on plates is produced in the UK, including the majority of grains, meat, dairy, and eggs”. But all of those products rely on imported feed or fertiliser.

Less than three months later and without any thought to food or energy security nationally or internationally, we allowed the government to throw the nation into the role of NATO chief cheerleader for a war in Europe and commit Britain to huge increases in arms spending for that war.

The amount of public spending committed this year and next for war is £2.3 billion at a time when all government spending is under review to find cuts, including farming subsidies.

Essential

But the link between the war in Ukraine and food insecurity is more than a distortion in our spending priorities as a nation. It has created cost increases in the essential inputs of food production, what farmers call “the three Fs” – feed, fuel and fertiliser.

The rising cost of fuel predated the war but is now steeper. British farmers face increased costs from one, if not all, of the three Fs. They are taking pragmatic decisions to temporarily cease production as their inputs (that is, costs) will exceed what they receive when they sell their livestock or crops.

The government’s food security report and food strategy include claims which don’t stand up to close scrutiny. For example, it says Britain is “Fully self-sufficient in liquid milk”. This is a half-truth.

There are still a few fully grass-fed, free-range dairies in Britain. But the massive increase in milk production per cow since the 1970s has been achieved by feeding them specialist dairy cattle feeds stuffed with imported maize, soy meal and other protein crops.

The rising cost of fuel and imported feed has already caused a decrease in milk production.

The food security report made similar claims about self-sufficiency in egg and poultry production, sectors that are even more reliant on imported feed. Unsurprisingly, a decline in egg and poultry

‘The impact on farm budgets and production will intensify...’

production has already begun.

This year’s crops were largely produced using last year’s stocks of fertiliser. But the impact on farm budgets and production will intensify. Fertiliser is acutely scarce and becoming more expensive across Europe – as Ukraine and Russia used to produce a third of the fertiliser supplies used across the continent.

Until this August Britain had one fertiliser plant, in Billingham on Teesside, capable of producing a third of our needs. This has now temporarily ceased production due the high cost of energy! This means no domestic production of fertiliser and a consequent loss of carbon dioxide production, a by-product and a key requirement in food processing. If food cannot be processed here, then less will be produced.

What way food security?

Food security for Britain has unarguably decreased dramatically over the past year, even if the full extent has not been formally measured. This omission must be rectified and targets for food production set. Emergency measures are needed to protect farmland. The review of agricultural policy to replace the CAP needs to be expedited and it must include measures to reward food production and to support innovation including skills development.

Despite the neglect of farming, there is still much innovation – for example the work of Lincoln Agri Robotics. The Centre uses the slogan “Developing locally. Delivering globally” and so often it is other countries which invest in our ideas and innovations.

The thing about food security is that it also needs to be developed locally and delivered locally! ■

The working class and their trade unions know that capitalism is doing a grand job for the capitalists...

Unions: be ruthless, seize



Enough is Enough demonstration, London, 1 October. But beware the idea that all action must be “coordinated”.

ON THE STREETS, the response of some people to the headline on the cover of the September/October edition of *Workers* – “Capitalism isn’t working” – was disagreement. Oh yes, it is working, they said... for the employers!

And there’s no possibility this time that employers and their governments can even whisper that workers are responsible for the crisis: it’s clear that the current inflation was initiated by the Bank of England and is being fuelled by the energy companies, and the war from which they are also profiting. And as for the propaganda war, the RMT and other unions have won that hands down with their careful and measured reasoning.

The media may use the anodyne expression “cost of living crisis”, but the unions know it is war on workers. As usual, wealth is being transferred from the workers to the employers. Workers know they are faced with raw capitalism. For example, we are experiencing pure speculation in energy production. Does it cost more to produce gas and electricity now than, say, three months ago? Has the cost of the raw resource increased? No.

Winners and losers

Let’s have a quick reminder of what that speculation consists of, who’s winning and who’s losing. The following snippets from a much longer list comes not from a trade union leaflet or communist journal but from Facebook. It had been shared many times, with the request: “Please keep it going so more get to see it”:

British Gas made a profit of £1.3 billion between January and June. BP announced profits of £6.95 billion between April and June alone. Shell, meanwhile, has profited by £9.4 billion in a year

Meanwhile there are people who haven’t had breakfast and/or lunch today, because they can’t afford it. People using food banks because food is becoming more of a luxury than a necessity. And children celebrating a birthday without presents.

The post continues with: “Something needs to change. Why is customers’ money being used to make life more comfortable for those who are making life more

Workers

Capitalism isn't working. At least not for us. But it seems to be

the right the rule

intolerable for the rest of us?"

It's hardly surprising that with this fury in the population at large, trade unions have seen a surge in membership enquiries of some 700 per cent. Workers across the country are seeing how collective action can win higher pay and save at-risk jobs, according to TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady. And the research is clear: the main reason why people don't join a union is that no-one has spoken to them about it. So that's an easy fix.

Who is striking?

It's heartening to read the long list of industrial action even on the BBC website, and without the usual underlying condemnation against workers taking action because the company knows workers are supporting workers. Again, here's just a snippet from the list:

Around 40,000 RMT members at 14 train companies and Network Rail walked out in a series of strikes over the summer - the biggest to hit the rail network in 30 years. The union has threatened to strike repeatedly until the end of the year if its demands are not met.

More than 40,000 workers at telecoms giant BT struck for several days in August.

Doctors in the British Medical Association are calling for a 30 per cent pay rise, raising the likelihood of action.

The Royal College of Nursing is calling for a pay rise of 5 per cent above inflation, and has upped its strike benefit to £50 a day, as public support for action grows.

The University and College Union has won a huge mandate for UK-wide strikes over pensions, pay and conditions under the banner of "UCU rising".

To help grasp the importance of this action by workers, it's worth remembering a bit of wisdom from the *Communist Manifesto*: "The real fruit of [workers'] battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers."

No place there for the divisiveness of identity politics! Though we will always deal with homophobic and racist elements - their poison weakens and undermines our class. Similarly, we must stand united throughout the regions of Britain to fight against the destructiveness of separatism

being peddled by a minority.

How will we show our strength as workers going forward? The new umbrella organisation Enough is Enough is an important part of the fight and in this respect is to be welcomed and embraced. It's been founded by trade unions and community organisations.

The organisation says it's "determined to push back against the misery forced on millions by rising bills, low wages, food poverty, shoddy housing - and a society run only for a wealthy elite". It continues: "We can't rely on the establishment to solve our problems. It's up to us in every workplace and every community."

It has five demands including: A Real Pay Rise, Slash Energy Bills and Tax the Rich. A rush to sign up in the opening hours of the Enough is Enough campaign saw the website crash, with organisers urging people to wait for traffic to die down before trying again.

Coordination?

That said, Enough is Enough is calling for "coordinated action", and we saw this also in the TUC's published agenda, which was peppered with motions for coordinated action - trying to marshal everyone together. That's a bad idea. And it isn't as effective as guerrilla struggle where unions work according to how far their own members are prepared to go.

It's good to have days - a demonstration perhaps - where we show collective strength and solidarity, but so-called united action can mean holding back for the lowest common denominator.

As an example of that, in a UCU branch in Scotland a vote to support the branch committee in negotiations for a pay increase was later overthrown in favour of a "fairer" offer which apparently all the campus unions could support. It's a madness which has the employer laughing all the way to the bank.

Guerrilla struggle means working for maximum damage to the enemy; minimum damage to ourselves. The strongest unions know they need to be pragmatic not idealistic. Perhaps the most famous British example of action coordinated by the TUC was the General Strike of 1926. It failed.

'We need to look forward, not stay locked in the past with tactics that worked then...'

We need to know our trade union history.

But we also need to look forward, not stay locked in the past. Some tactics that worked then and to some extent, depending on the sector, may still work now, may be far less effective than others. We need to be inventive and alert to the need for changes in industrial action that play to our strengths as we adapt to new working conditions.

For example, what about withdrawing our labour for say two to three hours on specified days, not necessarily at the same times on those days. Union members would be at their workplace, not locked out, dismissed and rehired on worse terms than they had before. It minimises any loss of pay.

Action along these lines would make it difficult for an employer to put in place contingency plans for such a short time. Any labour used to cover jobs whether temporary, casual or existing internal labour would have to be competent to undertake that work, and in many cases also certified by recognised industry bodies.

In short, we are wise to take our cue from the capitalist class: be ruthless, cleave to the interests of our class; articulate those interests and fight for them; move with the times. Take the right to rule for ourselves.

As a woman from the CWU explained at the TUC rally in London in June, the main point is there are hundreds and thousands of us and few of them. ■

This article is based on the introduction to a CPBML discussion meeting held online on 6 September.

London can either be a huge force for progress in an independent Britain or a colossal hindrance. One or the other it will be depends on everyone in the country, not just London.

London: workers need to



Workers

The City of London, viewed from the south bank of the River Thames.

OVER 9 MILLION people live in London, and its population is again increasing. It is by far the largest urban area in Britain, and arguably has been since the days of Roman Britain. London is also the biggest city in Europe and carries worldwide influence. You'd be a fool to turn your back on such a huge concentration of humanity.

But many beyond its confines embrace a disdainful approach to London. Terribly unwise, for either London becomes a huge force for progress in an independent Britain or a colossal hindrance. Our aim should be to make it a bastion of progress, though

This article is based on a CPBML public meeting held in Conway Hall, London, on 17 October.

this will definitely take time as it's nowhere near being one at present. More important, how can we make it happen?

London's pre-eminence means it is – and always has been – a magnet within our country, constantly drawing in new people, particularly the young. It's either the Great Wen (the disparaging name for London coined by William Cobbett, the champion of ruralism in the 1820s) sucking life out of the rest of the country, or a desirable beacon that has, to use Samuel Johnson's famous quote from the 18th century, "all that life can afford". Well, does London drain life out of the rest of the country, or is it merely bigger and different? Certainly it exerts a marked influence on the South East of England and East Anglia.

But all cities must regularly be renewed

or face decline and decay. No city has a divine right to coast forever on an earlier reputation or previous contributions.

Fundamental changes in London have increased the power of capital – particularly finance capital – while lessening the influence of working people and the power of working class organisations.

Industry

In the nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth century, London had a huge industrial manufacturing sector and it was then an industrial city as much as a financial or governmental or service one. Even in 1960 there were still over one and a half million industrial workers, and in 1971 there were 870,000 manufacturing jobs (17 per cent of London's total). Since then this sec-

pendent Britain, or a colossal hindrance instead. Which in the capital...

o take control



tor has shrunk by 85 per cent, and by 2010, London became the region containing the lowest proportion of employees engaged in British manufacturing.

Today London manufacturing at 2.2 per cent of the overall workforce is a small part of the capital's total economy and is less than a third of the numbers working in financial services. Even so, because of its size, London still has more manufacturing workers than, say, Manchester or Leeds, and a similar number to Wales.

How might London's economy be geared towards manufacturing again, given British capitalism's hostile attitude towards the restoration of industry? Certainly a shortage of appropriate industrial space, driven by demand for housing, is one obstacle. As is the cost of this space,

which is more than twice as expensive in London as most other parts of Britain. People need housing, but they also need work. Social planning must cater for industrial spaces.

Evidently London is already a hub for auxiliary industries relating to design and computer programming, accounting for 33 and 28 per cent of the UK's total employment in these respective sectors. However, a lot of London's production is in food and clothing, in retail and hospitality, where workers are often poorly paid.

Once London was a trade union stronghold, certainly leading the engineering unions for many decades. And in the 1960s and 1970s the same was often the case in the public sector too.

Destruction

With the destruction of manufacturing, and the retreat from involvement in trade unions by members, union positions have been seized by a variety of sectarian politicians out of touch with workers, causing the loss of London's leading role in the trade unions. Can it be brought back, and how?

There has been a big transformation on the other side of the class divide too. The major change of tack by our ruling establishment was the Big Bang deregulation of the financial markets in London in 1986, which led to the removal of traditional restrictive practices that were more likely to make bankers cautious. And the Big Bang also brought in the takeover and increasing domination of the sector by large banks, domestic and foreign.

Nowadays the super-wealthy use London as their playground. For the capitalist elites (homegrown and foreign) it is a hothouse in which to grow their capital, the centre of the world's finance markets.

According to *The Sunday Times* Rich List, there are in the UK roughly a hundred billionaires with a combined wealth of £653 billion. Around 95 of them live in London. And that's without the multi-millionaires here.

Constantly we hear the claim that as a leading financial centre our capital city has the ability to attract highly skilled global talent and draw in foreign investment. But does this process benefit working

'Once London was a trade union stronghold, certainly leading the engineering unions for many decades...'

Londoners, or is it malign? The amount of poverty and the general low wages in London indicates it is merely deceitful propaganda.

Significant and damaging consequences come from the London establishment's wholesale devotion to capital. It is impossible to see how the presence of this global wealth contributes to either the London, or the national, economy.

Interestingly, in the "quality of life rankings" of major world cities, London is not so high, not quite making it to the top 40, which probably corroborates evidence that much of our social infrastructure is inadequate and in need of improvement.

The idea that the City has a massive advantage due to its commitment to the rule of law is wearing very thin. There is a growing climate of financial illegality. The City is a key enabler in Britain receiving many billions of pounds' worth of criminally derived capital. And then there are its own multiple scandals and fines for malpractice.

A better course

Drastic changes like deindustrialisation and finance capital's increasingly elevated power have badly altered the political, economic and social landscape of London. What counteracting changes of our own are needed? What do working people need to pursue and enforce to correct the direction and put London on a better course?

Our focus must be on wages, jobs and

Continued on page 16



Continued from page 15

proper apprenticeships (especially in manufacturing), upskilling, education, health, campaigns for new hospitals, housing and accommodation. And all this has to be tackled at a time when we will face Austerity Mark 2. The first round brought much damage to service provision and the social fabric. The second round must be resisted. These types of sensible, popular struggles will produce greater class cohesion and assist integration within the working class.

Poverty pay

So many workers in London suffer low wages. People only get one shot at life and low wages restrict opportunities. The only answer to this problem is well conducted wage struggles that will bring the trade union movement back to life.

The London Dock Strike of 1889 showed that unskilled workers could also be organised, sweeping away pessimism and winning significant improvements. Where there's a will, there's a way – same today as in the past.

There is a higher cost of living within London. According to an April 2020 report by the Centre for Research in Social Policy

‘The cost of living is the main reason why so many young workers are leaving London...’

What are Londoners like?

- The average Londoner today is almost five years younger than the UK average.
- Over a third were born abroad, but more than three-quarters of Londoners are estimated to be British citizens.
- London's population is the most ethnically diverse in Britain, though that varies hugely by borough. And it is the most religiously diverse region of Britain.
- One in five count a language other than English as their main language compared to one in 20 in the rest of England and Wales.
- About 300 different languages are spoken by children in the capital's schools.

- Almost one in 20 Londoners were of mixed ethnicity at the time of the 2011 census.
- Poverty is much higher in London than in the rest of Britain. A third of all inner London residents, and nearly a quarter in outer London, are in poverty.
- Staggeringly, around 1.2 million of those in poverty live in a working family, an increase of 70 per cent in a decade.
- According to opinion polls, lots of residents identify as Londoners ahead of being British or English, indicating a weakness in national identity and commitment.

How can more be moved to think that they are part of Britain? ■

at Loughborough University, a basic standard of living in London costs up to 58 per cent more compared to the rest of the UK as a result of higher housing, childcare and transport costs.

The cost of living is the main reason why many young workers in essential jobs are leaving London to find cheaper areas elsewhere in Britain. This has happened in the past. In the early and mid-1970s there were major staffing crises in many sectors across London. Some unions responded with successful struggles to get an increased London Allowance.

For instance, in 1972-74 the school teachers' union pursued a long campaign of action including rolling 3-day strikes organised in a guerrilla fashion, culminating in a massive increase in the allowance and substantial back-payments. Unions should see if members are ready to campaign for increased London Allowances again.

Transport

On transport, the construction of the Elizabeth tube line is brilliant but an exception rather than the rule. Do we have to wait a few more decades before other additions and improvements occur? Many of the older underground lines need attention. Noise is at unpleasant and even unhealthy

levels on many lines.

How do you get things better? For one thing, workplace pressure could get better transport.

Travel across London is not arranged sensibly. We need fewer cars but public transport is not regular or cheap enough. Yet there are lessons in our past we could emulate. In October 1981 the GLC introduced a Fare's Fair policy. Fares were cut by 32 per cent, resulting in more passengers and fewer cars. Cheaper fares were subsidised, but the benefits to society outweighed the costs.

During the Second World War, there were regular and frequent tubes and buses to get people to essential war effort work in munitions and aircraft factories, for example. You didn't have more than a 1 or 2 minute wait for a tube. An excellent idea. But why just in wartime? Why not all the time?

Except for its higher cost of living, London is not special and it shares the same kinds of problems as the rest of the country. Other areas should press forward on their needs too.

A struggle for London's soul has commenced and it is a contest that is likely to be with us for quite some time as so much has to be transformed. ■

Government inaction has inflicted an uncertain future on Britain's largest producer of silicon chips...

Who holds the chips?



Jagger/geograph.org.uk (CC BY-SA 2.0)

The Newport Wafer Fab factory in Newport, south Wales.

THE FUTURE OF Britain's biggest producer of computer chips is in the balance. The government is set to rule on the takeover of Newport Wafer Fab by a Dutch company called Nexperia in July last year. Nexperia, though Dutch, is owned by a Chinese company called Wingtech, registered in Hong Kong and effectively controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, which holds a third of the shares.

The company makes silicon chips for a variety of applications, using a variety of technologies. They're called wafers because the chips are batch-produced on thin circular discs 200 millimetres wide. Each wafer can hold several hundred chips. The company also researches and produces new kinds of chips.

Newport Wafer Fab has its origin in a company called Inmos, set up with £50 million of UK government money in 1978. Then Margaret Thatcher was elected, and she pushed through its privatisation in 1984, by which time it had received a total of £211 million in government funding.

It's bad enough when this happens in transport or power generation. When it happens in hi-tech, it's potentially disas-

trous, because foreign governments can (the US certainly does) control where hi-tech products can be sold and who has access to them.

If the Newport takeover were an isolated example, disastrous would be a good word for it. But it's not. For several years now Britain's hi-tech companies have been the subject of a feeding frenzy – as the Unite union calls it – by foreign companies.

Delayed

The government has delayed a decision on the takeover three times, the first two by then-Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng. The decision date was pushed to 3 October, but then Jacob Rees-Mogg, who took over from Kwarteng, said he needed more time to consider things.

Given that Rees-Mogg waded through the Inmarsat sale 10 days after taking office, most likely he was weighing up the political costs of pushing the deal through. Against this background, stories have been appearing in the press – heavily denied by Nexperia – about its connections via Wingtech with the Chinese military.

These stories may be true or false, but

they have created a climate in which the former owner of Newport Wafer Fab, Drew Nelson, is being touted as someone who could lead a British consortium to take the company back. If the Nexperia deal falls through and another buyer is sought, Nelson has right of first refusal.

That possibility led to a letter to *The Times* by the staff association at the company. In it they say they have “absolutely no desire” to work under Nelson. They say that before being taken over by Nexperia the company was a “mis-managed, undercapitalised start-up, struggling to compete even in a buoyant market, ultimately resulting in it becoming a loss-making business.”

Regardless, mismanagement and lack of investment (undercapitalisation) run like a sickly seam throughout British industry. As long as that continues, workers may well tend to see foreign buyers as some kind of a saviour.

It shouldn't have to be a choice between underinvestment or foreign ownership. For workers everywhere in Britain, the way forward is to pick up the slogan discarded by the false friends of Brexit: Take Control! ■

Despite all the other current problems, Scottish nationalist
Scotland workers are more worried about the economy and

SNP record condemned



Workers

The large strike and cost of living crisis rally on 1 October in Glasgow city centre included RMT, Unison, EIS, CWU, GMB and supporters.

A RECENT OPINION poll suggests that only 7 per cent of Scottish voters think that holding another referendum on separating Scotland from Britain is among the most important issues on their minds. The poll, conducted by Survation and published on 6 October, revealed, unsurprisingly, that the cost of living crisis was at the top of the list of priorities, followed by the problems of the NHS and rising energy bills.

This came out two days ahead of the SNP annual conference in Aberdeen. In her speech, the SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon

doubled down on their policies with a renewed attempt to break up Britain and rejoin the European Union. There was no recognition of her administration's appalling record – just empty promises of a bright future and sniping at the woeful UK government.

Closer

But organised workers are increasingly taking aim at the SNP and Scottish Greens coalition in Holyrood and in city councils. The public mood is turning against the

focus on a separation referendum. Significantly, over 70 per cent of respondents in the poll indicated their preference for a closer working relationship between Scotland and the UK government.

One reason that so few people in Scotland currently consider independence to be a priority is the dim view they take of the feeble attempts of the devolved government to tackle the cost of living crisis.

About a quarter of respondents said this administration was doing everything possible to address the matter. The great

... continue to pursue their aim of disuniting Britain. Yet in
 ... the standard of living – worries shared across Britain...

as strikes grow

‘However Sturgeon tries to spin the figures, the result is always the same – Scotland needs Britain...’

majority thought it had performed poorly in handling a wide range of issues: the economy, the NHS and social care, transport, ferries and local council funding.

The results of the poll suggested that barely a third of voters supported the bid to hold a second referendum on leaving the UK next year. And when asked how they would vote in such a referendum with the question “Should Scotland remain a part of the United Kingdom or leave the United Kingdom?”, 59 per cent said “remain” with only 41 per cent saying “leave”.

Fantasy economics

Pamela Nash of Scotland in Union pointed out that instead of accepting the decisive referendum result on 2014, the SNP First Minister had, in her conference speech, spent most of the time “agitating again for the break-up of the United Kingdom, dragging us back into a toxic and divisive debate. If this conference has taught us anything, it is that, from the very top, the nationalists’ campaign for separation is as aggressive and incoherent as ever.”

Nash pilloried the “SNP’s fantasy economics on pensions” and their view that a hypothetical separate Scotland could claim compensation and payments from the “UK pension pot”.

In contrast to the fantasies of the SNP and Scottish Greens, what is urgently needed is a united call from workers across Britain for a national plan to avoid economic meltdown.

Since 2008, Britain’s finances would have collapsed if our British pension funds had not provided the government with credit by buying gilts (government bonds).

At one point, until the Bank of England intervention, it looked like Britain’s capital markets were about to implode along with the occupational pensions that so many workers rely on.

The lure of the EU

With the re-emergence in the UK government of long term EU supporters like Jeremy Hunt, appointed as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the wake of the September mini Budget chaos, the SNP and Scottish Greens may take comfort from having such friends.

They seem to relish the vision of the EU, an organisation which has the capitalist class’s beloved “four freedoms” enshrined in its treaties and has a constitution committing all members to a “highly competitive market economy”, as well as a disregard for the sovereignty of member nations.

With such an allegiance to capitalism and its inevitable course of intensifying exploitation, it is not surprising that workers in Scotland, especially those now embarking on campaigns to protect wages and conditions, have included the SNP and Scottish Greens in their focus.

Deficit

As it turns out, the SNP and Scottish Greens’ dream of rejoining the EU is yet another fantasy. Scotland has a deficit more than double the 3 per cent limit required for membership. Its deficit of 7 per cent is over six times higher than that of Britain as a whole.

Meanwhile, Scottish public services are protected to an extent through the pooling and sharing of resources across the UK. To achieve membership of the EU, Scotland would need to dramatically reduce its deficit, requiring deep spending cuts and steep tax rises – a cost of living crisis on top of a cost of living crisis.

However Sturgeon tries to spin the figures from Government Expenditure and Revenues Scotland (GERS), the result is always the same – Scotland needs Britain. These statistics were developed to support the independence case, but fail to do so. It does not wash with people to say that the figures are not accurate or that they are

better than last year or that they don’t show the true picture for Scotland after partition.

Sturgeon’s bullish proclamation that the second referendum attempting to remove Scotland from Britain would take place on 19 October 2023 is now stuck in the mud. Her own most senior law officer, Scottish Lord Advocate Dorothy Bain KC, refused to sign off on the draft referendum bill in fear that it may have exceeded Holyrood’s powers.

Consent

In response, Holyrood asked for the question to be referred to the national Supreme Court. Could Scotland hold a legally watertight referendum without British government consent? The British government’s chief legal adviser on issues of national importance described the bid to hold a second independence referendum as “not an opinion poll, but an attempt to break up the Union.”

The Court has deferred its decision for months. And it may even decide that the question is incompetent. Thus the timetable for the proposed unapproved referendum has been thrown into confusion. This should give the people of Britain extra time and opportunity to reinforce arguments against the break up of Britain.

The building of British unity, integration and solidarity is essential for survival in the current crisis, as is the assertion of our national interest. There is a strong democratic mandate for such a course. The people of Scotland exercised their right to determine their own destiny in the 2014 referendum. The outcome should not be described as “once in a generation” – a recipe for continual re-runs.

And the majority who voted at the 2019 general election did so for parties which want Britain to stay united. And a far greater proportion of the population voted in that election than voted in the 2021 Holyrood election.

No matter what the political makeup of the British parliament, it has the duty and responsibility to hold the UK together. Workers in national trade unions must see their own unity reflected in governance at the national level and demand that the government of the day exercise its functions. ■

Now in paperback, an account of taxation and government past three centuries casts an interesting light on the nation

Taxes, taxes, everywhere



Public domain

Cartoon from the Regency period lampooning government taxes. The Prince Regent (later George III), with both legs gouty and swollen, says to a complaining John Bull: "Yes and I would take the blood from your veins if I could get any thing for it."

The dreadful monster and its poor relations: taxing, spending and the United Kingdom 1707-2021, Julian Hoppit, paperback, 352 pages, ISBN 978-0141992266, Penguin, 2022, £12.99. Kindle and eBook editions available.

TAXES ARE in the news again, but the role they play in our economy and society is not always well understood. This carefully researched and fascinating account of taxation and spending over the past 300 years is now out in paperback. It also offers insight about the nature of Britain and how our nation has developed.

The author, Julian Hoppit, is Professor of British History at University College London. His narrative traces the course of public finances, starting with the 1707 Act of Union. Scotland became joined with England and Wales, having shared a king but not a parliament for most of the previous century.

Ireland was subordinate, but later incorporated into the union from 1800, until partition and independence for a part of that

island in 1922. And more recently Hoppit covers the partial devolution of taxation and spending to Scotland and Wales.

The book takes its title from a piece of Scottish verse published soon after the 1707 Act of Union which called the newly unified state the "dreadfull Monster", with London gorging itself on new taxes. This divisive and mythical account lives on in nationalist circles.

Darien disaster

The background to the union was the disastrous Darien scheme – an attempt by Scotland in 1698 to set up a Central American colony. It collapsed after two years, leaving their finances in ruin. Opposition to a centralised state after the union was less about tax and more about resentment at English capitalism being able to take advantage of a weak, and still partly feudal, economy.

The newly United Kingdom set about taxing all of its citizens in a centralised way. The burden didn't just fall on Scotland. When Benjamin Franklin famously wrote in

1789 that "...in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes", he was echoing ideas expressed earlier that century by English writers such as Daniel Defoe.

The opposing myth is that London is the source of the nation's wealth and all the other parts of Britain are the "Poor Relations", a drain on the public purse; "subsidy junkies" in the ugly phrase some Thatcherite ministers used.

Part of Britain's official self-image that it is a well-run and united country, in contrast to our neighbours, with their revolutions and dictatorships. In fact, our history is far more turbulent than that complacent vision. There have often been tensions between different parts of the country about how it should be run, and most significantly, about who should pay for what.

Wealth creation

While he does not address the question of the ultimate creation of wealth, Professor Hoppit's analysis shows that the pattern of taxation and spending is more complicated than the two simple myths identified in the book's title.

He notes that in the late 18th century, "Despite the rapid rises in the tax take in Scotland from 1780, there was no revolt or rising there. America had been lost in part because of London's tax policies towards it. The French Revolution arose from the bankruptcy of the French state. In Scotland, there was nothing of the kind. Ireland, though, was to be a very different story."

In the 1840s too, Scotland was very different from Ireland: "On the eve of the Famine, Scotland was clearly flourishing within a political economy which, since the 1780s, it had helped to frame." Ireland was never integrated into the rest of Britain. It would be a mistake to think that the cause of Irish independence was just about excessive taxation, even though that was a factor. And ever since partition, the UK government has subsidised spending in the north of Ireland.

Coming to more recent debates, Hoppit observes that some Scottish separatists have claimed that "the relative prosperity of south-east England was due to the

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**'Hoppit's analysis
damns the financial
case for Scottish
separation from the
rest of Britain...'**

presence of central government there. Welsh nationalists such as Gwynfor Evans had argued much the same before."

Cause and effect

This confusion of cause and effect, as this book shows, would have been familiar three centuries ago. As usual, it does not explain why the reduction of London's vitality would increase that of other parts of the Union. This complaint also falsely frames problems in "national" terms, ignoring the many areas of England that severely lag behind London (which itself has many poor areas).

Hoppit's analysis damns the financial case for Scottish separation from the rest of Britain, "One thing that became clear in these debates was that, in terms of the balance of revenue and expenditure, Scotland did relatively well out of the UK as a fiscal compact. Indeed, it did better than some English regions, undermining a simple narrative of two nations facing one another. ... If it was clear that the price of independence was a lower standard of living than that achieved in the rump of the UK, this would be honest and thoughtful, but it would also probably mean the SNP losing any future referendum."

In conclusion, he writes, "Current invocations of addressing regional economic imbalances by levelling up will be inadequate without significant redistribution. As this supposes, if the Union is to be more content with itself, the benefits of the sharing of risk and resources across its extent, organized centrally, have to be celebrated, with the language of "subsidy" consigned to the rubbish bin of history and less presumption that what seems right for England must be right for the rest of the UK." ■

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Heightened class struggle in the early 1970s was neutered by the government and trade union establishment working in tandem.

1974–1978: the Social Contract

MANY CONFIDENT working class struggles erupted in the early 1970s across a huge range of disputes and sectors. The highlights were the engineering union's destruction of the 1971 Industrial Relations Act and the miners' victory over the imposition of a three-day week.

After this tricky period for the Establishment, the incoming 1974 Labour government stabilised capitalism, coordinating moves to dampen down industrial action. It preached class conciliation by dangling bribes to the unions in exchange for moderation of wages.

The Labour government promised to repeal the Industrial Relations Act, introduce food subsidies and freeze council rent increases. In return, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) said it would ensure union cooperation in submitting to voluntary wage restraint "to combat rising inflation" – the Social Contract.

Ted Heath's Conservative ministry (1970-74) had failed to control the enormous surge of industrial struggle fuelled by opposition to anti-union legislation and rampant inflation. The new Labour government aimed for organised labour to cooperate with the state and to drop the turbulent industrial relations of the previous period. The TUC willingly agreed.

In March 1974, our Party warned that Labour's Social Contract meant the working class accepting a clampdown in return for what they had already won by themselves. The Labour government pretended it ended the miners' strike; it did not – the miners had effectively won their battle for wage increases before Labour took office. But Labour expected other workers to

'Workers were sold the big lie that what had already been won by their own struggles was a gift from Labour...'

refrain from pressing comparable claims.

Labour also made a big play about tearing up anti-working class legislation like the Industrial Relations Act. Another distortion: workers led by the engineering union had already made this legislation inoperative by their own organised resistance and strike actions.

Workers were sold the big lie that what already had been won by their own struggle was really a gift of the Labour government. It also peddled the fairy tale that if workers were moderate in their demands, they would be better protected than by taking industrial action for higher wages.

The reality was different – workers accepted greater exploitation, and the government abandoned "voluntary" wage restraint. But the Labour government and the TUC were taking on more than pay claims.

Corporate state

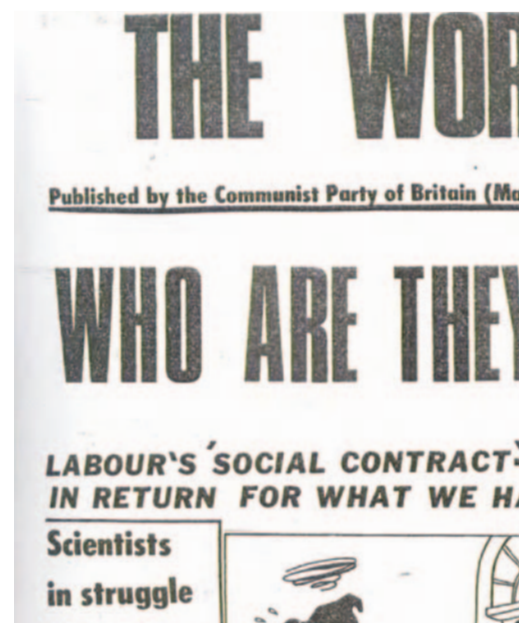
In June 1974 the CPBML spelled out the risks in this way: "The Labour Party is the major vehicle for the advancement of the corporate state; a fascist state rule which seeks to destroy the weapons of workers' struggle and to subjugate the working class. The Labour Party's pernicious role is to attempt to secure the acquiescence of the working class to its own enslavement..."

"The right of collective bargaining, like the emancipation of the working class, is not something which can be bestowed on us from high. It can only be won and maintained by our own continuous struggle."

By July 1975, the Labour government was no longer prepared to tolerate voluntary wage restraint. It introduced a formal incomes policy within the Contract to operate in stages over the following four years.

At first the Labour government managed to prevent pay rises generally exceeding the "agreed" level – in other words, the cap it dictated. But the capitalist economy continued to deteriorate in Britain, and the government's sweetheart promises did not fully materialise.

High rates of inflation, rising unemployment, an IMF loan, deflationary spending cuts and interest rate increases exposed the one-sided nature of trade union commitments to the Contract. Observance



Headline from *The Worker* in 1974, warning of the

begin to fray and trade union members called for wage increases in line with and above inflation. By September 1977 the annual TUC conference voted decisively for a return to collective bargaining within the next year.

Army deployed

Yet the trade unions mostly continued to support the government, at least to the extent of not rocking the boat or openly challenging it and discouraged any others from doing so. The most notable example was the TUC's refusal to support the Fire Brigades Union strike in November 1977 for a pay rise greater than allowed under the Contract. The government deployed the army, won the dispute and the Contract remained just about intact.

By 1978 the limits on pay increases under the Social Contract were unacceptable in the face of a deteriorating quality of living faced by most workers. Even then the TUC continued to avoid confrontation with the government.

Then on 22 September 1978 a strike started at Ford Motor Company. It lasted eight weeks and ended with Ford offering a 17 per cent pay rise to their workers. The Labour government failed to pass a bill

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Contract

WORKER



(Marxist-Leninist) No. 6 March 21st 1974 Price 3p

... KIDDING?

... ACCEPTING A CLAMPDOWN ... HAVE ALREADY WON

The Labour Government pretends that it ended the miners' strike and its return is opening other sections of the working class to restraint from pressing comparable claims. The miners had already won their battle for justifiable increases in pay before Labour took office.

The great deception

... dangers of the new Social Contract.

through parliament to apply sanctions against Ford for breaking the 5 per cent pay limit. The Social Contract was effectively broken.

Class conciliation, especially when it seeks to constrain future actions, inevitably veers towards class collaboration so long as ruling class interests remain in control

The practice of the Social Contract led to the voluntary emasculation of trade unions and a greater passivity on the part of the working class. The ruling class will always attempt to bind workers to promises of restraint, but will always excuse themselves from commitments when they deem it necessary. But it's folly for workers to voluntarily surrender control to the opposing class

Hopefully we learn from the mistakes of the past. We should beware any calls for a new Labour government being encouraged into office to forge a new social contract in return for the repeal of anti-trade union legislation, the provision of energy subsidies, or a freeze on rent and mortgage increases. ■

• A longer, more detailed analysis is available online at cpbml.org.uk.

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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.

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

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

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Some honest thinking, at last

‘The TUC can reflect class thinking, good or bad, but it is in the constituent unions and their industries where progress will happen...’

THE TUC CONGRESS met in Brighton from 18 to 20 October, having been delayed by the Queen’s death. Much of the agenda was routine and predictable, but some unions are thinking honestly and hard about the future of their industries and of Britain.

Take two examples. The GMB, one of the largest unions, proposed a motion on economic recovery and manufacturing jobs which stated that “rebuilding a modern, high-tech, manufacturing sector as the fundamental wealth creating aspect of the economy should be a priority”; that “the power of the finance sector must be curtailed”; and that “we must build up self-reliant production, with extensive government and local government procurement from British-based and -owned producers”.

Who could object to that? Yet objections did come, for the GMB organises workers in defence, and this offended some delegates in non-industrial unions, who consider such workers morally tainted. Nevertheless, Congress passed the motion and will campaign for a national commission for manufacturing to oversee a revival of production and skills development.

Another positive example, from one of the smallest unions, was a motion from the Royal College of Podiatry calling for an industrial strategy to provide fit for purpose, personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers and those in social care. Before the pandemic less than 1 per cent of the PPE used in Britain was made here. The motion said we should ensure this never happens again – by putting a strategy in place for production in Britain.

There’s no need to comment here in detail on the proceedings of the TUC. Workers can read them for themselves elsewhere, if they wish, and they have a keen nose for the platitudes, self-promotion, and wrecking sometimes present in motions.

Many of the motions, intentionally or not, misrepresent the role of the TUC and seek to make it something it can never be. For example a motion from the PCS union, representing civil servants, called on the TUC to coordinate industrial action.

The PCS should consider working class

history: the last time the TUC tried to coordinate strikes was 1926, and that didn’t end well. Nor did the TUC’s promotion of the social contract in the 1970s – see Historic Notes in this edition.

The strength of British trade unions comes from their history of skill – the organisation of skilled trades and crafts, based on the workplace. In other countries trade union federations were built on political or even religious affiliation.

The TUC can reflect class thinking, good or bad, but it is in the constituent unions and their industries where progress will happen.

A letter sent out to the Unite membership in October may indicate a refreshing return to basics. The union’s general secretary Sharon Graham, elected in August 2021, is in office at a time when, as she says, “employers are emboldened” to launch an assault on jobs and wages, many using the tactic of fire and rehire. P&O Ferries and the Ports of Felixstowe and Liverpool spring to mind. And there are others. In truth, there is no such thing as the good employer.

The Unite letter sets out key priorities for the union – focused on the workplace and the class relationship between capital and labour. Nowhere is there mention of the divisive and distracting issues of identity, gender and race. New members will be in no doubt they are joining an organised fight for jobs, pay and conditions – precisely what unions are for.

Nor does Unite expect to rely on the TUC. A permanent dispute team will support those in struggle, shop stewards and workplace reps will be strengthened, bargaining will be coordinated, the training of reps brought back in-house and “dedicated to building power at the workplace”. A review of democratic structures within the union is intended to devolve more power over crucial decisions to the membership via their shop stewards.

Unite has committed itself to ensuring that workers are not made to pay the price of the pandemic, the energy crisis and inflation, the war in Ukraine, or any other crisis foisted on us by the capitalist class. Now it will be up to the membership to see that the union lives up to its ideals. ■

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