

WORKERS

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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025 £1



IS THE TIDE TURNING ON NET ZERO?

ORGANISE Class control

WATER Clear as muck

TRADE WARS Threat to jobs

NHS Time for a rebuild

GRADUATES Frozen out

DEBT In the red

WELFARE Focus on work

plus Historic Notes,

MIGRATION We need to talk

News, Reviews and

INDUSTRY It's our life blood

more

WORKERS



Organise! Educate! Control!

WHEN WORKERS discuss the state Britain is in, the question that follows inevitably is what can be done about it? It's a tough question, one not yet answered.

Workers engage in many struggles to assert what they think is right – small and large, well-known and obscure, in the workplace and elsewhere.

But all the struggles reflect the nature of capitalist society today – the overwhelming majority of the people in Britain have little or no control over the accumulated wealth of their labour. Without that, we have no direct control over Britain's future either.

So what's to be done? And who will do it? Start with organisation. When workers combine and organise they can change their lives.

Workers' organisation is powerful. The strength of workers when they get together in common cause scares the ruling class.

Trade unions became significantly more effective when workers learned in the mid-19th century to establish their unions as permanent, ongoing bodies.

The nature of those organisations reflected the need to cooperate. Lessons were learned about how to organise, when to fight and when to hold back. So education in struggle is important.

Collaborating in political and economic action is a natural result of the nature of work. Workers depend on each other to produce goods and services in myriad ways. But where there is capitalism and the exploitation of their labour, workers are in competition with each other, for jobs and wages.

As workers' organisation in unions developed they learned to deal with that competition. They developed a democracy which sought unity of purpose, through debate, and the rule of the majority over the minority in action. The ruling class perpetually tries to attack and undermine that democracy, as it seeks to limit workers' organisation.

So what then are workers to do with their organisation and understanding in the wish to control their future? These two assets cannot be taken for granted, they have to be used, learned and re-learned in practice.

First avoid the cynical view that nothing can be done. (Employers and the ruling class love that approach.) Engage in struggles, large or small, where the opportunity and need exist. That's not heroic, just necessary, and in the end unavoidable.

And take the broadest view of your fellow workers. In a dispute at work you don't ask questions about political, religious or cultural affiliations, you just want commitment to the common goal. It also means standing out against divisive, false struggles.

Such an approach – whether in a pay dispute or fighting against solar farms on agricultural land – is no guarantee that workers can achieve a better Britain. But not to take these steps will perpetuate the cycle of false promises and disappointment. It's in our hands to make a difference by understanding what makes workers strong and using that understanding to start to gain control of our country. ■



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

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

www.cpbml.org.uk [info@cpbml](mailto:info@cpbml.org)
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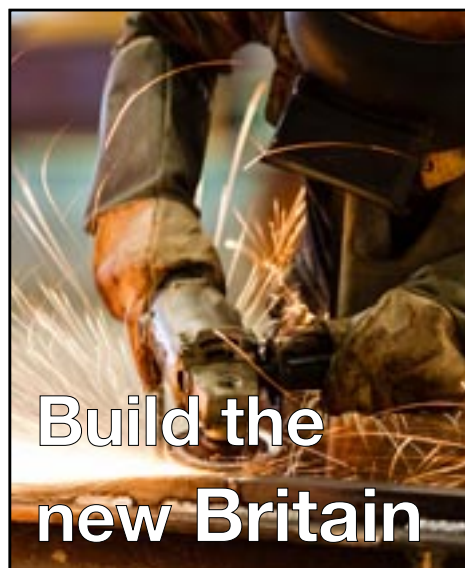
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Workers

Physiotherapists at the Royal London Hospital fighting on pay, February 2023.

NHS freezes out new graduates

DESPITE STAFF shortages newly qualified medical professionals in all disciplines are finding it hard to get jobs. This wasteful situation has a direct impact on patient care.

As newly graduated health professionals celebrate their achievements, their thoughts turn to finding work. There should be no difficulty. Britain is in desperate need of more doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, radiographers and many more health professionals.

Yet many NHS employers have imposed recruitment freezes. Four professional unions – The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Midwives and the Royal College of Nursing – have raised the issue.

Their joint letter to the health secretary draws attention to the situation, and demands that every health graduate who wants one is offered an NHS contract.

A survey of student midwives by the Royal College of Midwives found that 80 per cent were not confident of finding work on graduation. Yet existing midwives and maternity support workers are working an estimated 118,000 unpaid hours of overtime each week to meet the needs of their patients.

Half the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy's workplace reps report recruitment freezes or delays in filling physiotherapy posts. One in ten report that their health trust has completely frozen recruitment of clinical staff. In 2024 physiotherapy graduates were finding it more difficult to find a job than they were two years earlier. ■

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

BIOETHANOL

Largest plant closes

THE GOVERNMENT'S trade deal with the US has led to the closure of Vivergo Fuels bioethanol plant in Saltend, Humberside.

The deal scrapped tariffs on a quota of 1.4 billion litres of bioethanol from the US, the exact size of British production. This will allow US ethanol to flood the British market.

The Vivergo plant is owned by Associated British Foods (ABF) and was Britain's largest producer of bioethanol fuel – a fuel derived from plants and considered to be a green alternative to fossil fuels.

Vivergo bought up to 1 million tonnes of wheat each year from British farmers. The last wheat delivery to the plant was on 1 August. Redundancy of its 160 employees began on 19 August.

Over 4,000 British farmers supplied the plant and will now have to find alternative buyers for their wheat, facing weaker prices due to the drop in demand. The closure is also a blow to Britain's logistics industry. ■

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

FACTS MATTER

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

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

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



ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at cpbml.org.uk

The first plan for nurses – demand employment!

Newly qualified nurses this year don't have jobs to go to due to a recruitment freeze. This is a crucial point in their careers and the NHS needs them. Action is needed!

Hollowing out London: school closure

A *Workers* reader writes to point out that the closure of primary schools is both a symptom of workers being priced out of London and something which will hinder its reversal.

Respect our bleeding skills, say phlebotomists

A group of workers in Gloucestershire are taking on their healthcare trust, which refuses to pay them at the right grade.

Cardiff bus fight for pay and conditions

Cardiff bus workers, members of Unite union, are to vote on a new pay offer after being set for three weeks of continuous strike action.

Bus disputes in south east England

Arriva bus workers in south east England are being balloted on strike action over a below-inflation pay offer.

Plus: the e-newsletter

Visit cpbml.org.uk to sign up to your free regular copy of the CPBML's electronic newsletter, delivered to your email inbox. The sign-up form is at the top of every website page – an email address is all that's required.

Workers



Allotments, north London – a valuable part of food production and of community life.

Threat to allotments is real

DEPUTY PRIME minister Angela Rayner prompted a storm of outrage when it emerged that she has eased the way for councils to sell off allotments. This is an unexpected effect of the planning changes she announced in March. The threat is real, despite government assurances.

According to a report in *The Guardian* on 5 August, the National Allotment Society (NAS) cautioned that headlines predicting the demise of the allotment were alarmist. NAS said that many protections were already in place and, as a consultee on allotment closures, it will always ensure due process is followed.

Those protections are not strong, which is a concern to those fearing for the future of their allotments. The worry is that the drive for housing will trump the evident utility of the land for allotment holders. They will know Rayner created a "grey belt" planning category, carved out of green belt land – and destined for housing – hoping that label (and changes to the rules) would stifle opposition.

If cash-strapped local councils (the majority), see an opportunity to raise money by selling allotments to a developer, they must apply to the secretary of state (Rayner) for permission. But once a site is seen to be under threat in that way, many allotment holders will abandon it. And eventually it will meet the legal threshold for sale as being "underutilised". That's the sort of approach slum landlords and dodgy developers use. ■

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

HOUSING

A reader writes

A READER of *Workers* responds to our article about London housing:

"The recent *Workers* article about housing in London was quite right to say that building more houses is no way to address London's housing problems.

"However there was a significant omission as it did not address the role of foreign investors in contributing to the problem. According to a recent report in *The Times* almost 27 per cent of the total London properties sold in the first three months of 2024 were acquired by foreign buyers.

"Taken together with work by the London School of Economics which shows that for every 1 per cent increase in the share of residential transactions to foreign entities, the market witnesses a 2.1 per cent increase in house prices, it is clear that this is the first step which needs to be tackled.

"Ban these sales, or if not charge a significant tax.

"The simplest way to moderate prices for new homes would be to ban sales of London properties to buyers resident overseas. If the government would not consider a ban, why not impose a significant tax (say) 50 per cent? I suspect many would still be sold but all the revenue could be used for social housing."

• Thanks to our reader for this response. The problem described is getting worse: ten years earlier, in 2014, around 7 per cent of residential property sales were to overseas buyers. These buyers may be in the market to rent out the properties, or to sell later at a higher price. Either way, the effect is detrimental for the domestic housing market – increasing prices and also taking rents or capital profits abroad.

In 2017 the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, commissioned a report about overseas investment in new housing builds. This provided much detailed information. Little apparent use has been made of it and no curbs on overseas owners have been applied. Khan's overall record on housing has been much criticised. ■

FOOD

Meals factory victory

WORKERS AT Wrexham's Oscar Mayer ready meals factory are celebrating after concluding their long-running industrial dispute with the company, marked by the signing of a statutory recognition agreement. This follows an earlier trade dispute agreement that secured the reinstatement of 26 dismissed workers and improvements to holiday compensation.

More than 500 Unite members at the plant took over 200 days of strike action

between September 2024 and April 2025 in a fight for their colleagues' jobs, and over terms and conditions of employment. The company attempted to slash pay by up to £3,000 a year by firing workers and rehiring them on inferior contracts.

The workers have now secured an agreement that not only reinstates the dismissed workers but also compensates workers for the loss of paid breaks, gets members an extra day's holiday if they work bank holidays, allows them to carry over accrued holidays to 2026 and for the first time puts in place a formal recognition agreement. ■



The oil refinery overlooks the River Humber.

Lindsey refinery set to close

LIQUIDATORS HAVE taken over Lindsey oil refinery in Lincolnshire, which is set to close. In June the owner Prax Group went into administration, putting 420 jobs directly at risk. It is one of only six refineries in Britain – and one of those, Petroineos Grangemouth, is about to shut.

Energy minister Michael Shanks said in July there were “no credible offers” to buy the whole refinery. Production ended at the beginning of August. But pleas from local politicians for the government to continue the search for a buyer of the whole operation have not met with success. There are some reports of interest in the site or parts of the business.

The plant has provided 10 per cent of Britain's fuel supply. It is significant to the fuel supply and industry of Lincolnshire and the Midlands. The highly skilled workers who work at the plant are facing redundancy.

Unite the Union said that the government should “...reverse the premature decision to stop buying crude oil and to extend the time to find a viable long-term solution for the site.” The union pointed out that the jobs of other workers beyond those at the site rely on the refinery. The union is also asking questions about the huge amounts that owners Sanjeev Kumar and Arani Soosaipilla were paying themselves while their business was failing – at least £11.5 million in pay and dividends between when they bought the refinery in 2021 and June of this year.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said that the Prax owners “...must be held to account for endangering a critical piece of national energy infrastructure and leaving hundreds of workers in uncertainty about their livelihoods.” Government officials managing the liquidation have been unable to track down the owners.

- In 2009, workers at Lindsey refinery, then owned by Total Energy, went on strike after foreign contractors were brought in rather than offering jobs to British workers. Total sacked hundreds of workers for taking unofficial action, which promoted a further strike and support from construction workers elsewhere. Almost all were reinstated. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

SEPTEMBER

Tuesday 9 September, 7pm

Online CPBML Discussion Meeting (via Zoom)

“The British working class and its trade unions”

For better or worse, there's nothing like British trade unions, set up by workers, not by employers, government or church.

The working class created unions in order to survive. Without them capitalism would have starved us and worked us to death

But defence is not enough. If we don't remove the attackers, they keep coming back. British workers want change, but they still expect someone else to do it for them. That must change.

Come and discuss. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation.

Saturday 20 September

Main Gate, RAF Lakenheath, Brandon, Suffolk. Assemble 1pm.

CND National Demonstration
“Kick out Trump's nukes!”

US nuclear weapons have been deployed to Britain for the first time since 2008. This is a major escalation that makes Britain a target in the event of any nuclear war.

OCTOBER

Wednesday 15 October, 7.30pm

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

In-person CPBML Public Meeting

“No to NATO/EU war!”

The government talks peace but can't keep away from its drive to war. Starmer wants to support Ukraine and now to become involved in the Pacific too.

The ruling class uses war overseas to divert from its problems at home. But the British working class can best act as a force for peace by calling for an end to foreign adventures and interference.

Come and discuss. All welcome. Free entry.

**A new government-commissioned report into the water industry
But its proposals go nowhere near what is needed, and risk**

The future for water: as

THE LABOUR Government's Independent Water Commission has produced a report on the water industry, to try to damp down public anger at the industry's dreadful performance. But it falls far short of answering fundamental questions about the cause and what's to be done.

The commission, led by Sir John Cunliffe, a senior civil servant, who served as Deputy Governor of the Bank of England for Financial Stability, was given the remit of looking only at ways to "improve the privatised regulated model". But the model itself is the problem that has brought about raw sewage flowing into our rivers, lakes and seas, soaring bills, excessive shareholder dividends and unjustifiable directors' salaries and bonuses.

The report, published on 21 July, is a scorching indictment of the way that this vital industry is organised. It said, "Neither the industry as a whole, nor the regulator, appears to have a clear understanding of the amount of intervention and investment required to reach a sustainable level of renewal, nor the standard it should be aiming for."

Resilience

The commission said that as a result, it did not have a clear view of the condition of water industry – its assets, past renewal and maintenance, and overall resilience. The report says that's not good enough, "Infrastructure resilience should be a strategic imperative for water companies, rather than an afterthought."

There are other aspects of failure too: no integrated planning across the water system; the planning that currently exists is not comprehensive; and decision-making is fragmented.

The commission recommends creating a single National Water Strategy "to support stable long-term investment planning". But it then refuses to recommend creating the single authority needed to implement such planning.

Perversely it recommends devolving planning powers by creating eight new regional water planning authorities in England, with a separate authority for Wales. That looks like the opposite of integrated planning.

And because of devolution there's an



Workers

Poster put up by residents in Sussex frustrated by failure to repair a long-standing leak. P

absurd recommendation to divide responsibility for the River Severn along the Welsh border! The longest river in Britain, it is prone to extensive flooding: a clear case for being managed as a whole.

The single systems planner in Wales would be accountable to the Senedd, but not to the British government or people.

The commission also recommends creating a new National Water Strategy for Wales. It happily advocates planning across the whole of Wales, but not across the whole of Britain!

When ministers point to £44 billion of new investment by 2030, they fail to mention that the British people will fund this through higher bills. Speaking at the

report's launch, Cunliffe said, "We have to recognise that the cost of producing water and waste water services is likely to increase over the medium and longer term as the industry has to replace ageing assets, respond to higher environmental and public health standards and continue to adapt to the challenges of population growth and climate change."

Bills

Last year, Ofwat said the water companies could raise our bills by an average of 36 per cent by 2030. And some companies have challenged that as too low.

Environment Secretary Steven Reed claimed at the report's launch that house-

Industry is good (in parts) at identifying glaring problems. Risk fragmenting the industry even further...

clear as muck



chief financial officers for the 2024-25 financial year – Thames Water, Anglian Water, Southern Water, United Utilities, Wessex Water and Yorkshire Water.

But that hasn't stopped the gravy train. Southern Water evaded the ban by giving its CEO an 80 per cent pay increase to £1.4 million, which Ofwat accepted. In April, Thames Water paid £2.5 million in bonuses to 21 senior staff to reward them for taking out an absurdly high-interest loan. And Yorkshire Water's CEO was simply paid £1.3 million by its parent company.

The commission grudgingly acknowledged concerns about the level of dividends. It says, "There are legitimate questions about whether companies have, in some cases, issued dividends at the expense of their own financial resilience."

Dire

But that's as far as it goes: the commission says that it "...agrees with Ofwat's existing approach, whereby companies must show dividend levels reflect company performance." But it does not examine the mismatch between inflated dividends and dire performance across the sector. Incredible!

If the companies had paid out less in inflated salaries, bonuses and dividends, they would have had more available to invest. Instead, Cunliffe repeats the line put forward by the CEOs (in their own interest) that companies need to attract the best people.

The commission makes the dubious claim that, "companies were able, as intended, to finance new infrastructure through borrowing without the ratio of debt to equity becoming so high as to threaten their financial resilience headroom."

But Thames Water's £16 billion debt threatens its future, with administration and takeover imminent. And it's not alone – the sector had combined debt of £60 billion last year.

Ofwat would be scrapped as one of 88 measures set out to tackle problems in the water sector. The report notes that the regulatory system was far too fragmented and states that "fully joined-up regulation is essential for the system to meet the demands of the future." But it then recommends that Wales should have a separate economic regulator, and that Ofwat's

'If companies had paid less in bonuses and dividends, they would have had more available to invest...'

responsibilities should be integrated into Natural Resources Wales.

Much commentary on the report has focused on regulation of the industry, or in the case of some trade unions only about protections for their members. Unison the leading union in the sector, took a broader view. It says that the industry needs fundamental change, not tinkering with regulation. Certainly people care about reducing pollution and leaks and limiting increased bills; regulation is only a means to those ends.

The commission has failed to address the problems faced by those who work in the industry, those who actually run it. The industry has skills and recruitment challenges which the companies are ignoring.

Safety

The companies continue to put profit before public safety. For example Thames Water recently sacked a GMB member who raised concerns about unsafe practices at Mogden Sewage Treatment Works.

Calls for nationalisation must not obscure the key need for workers in the industry to take both personal and collective responsibility for their industry. The whole culture in the water industry has to change.

Our class should focus on the whole industry, its purpose and function. We must enforce professional standards of competence and public safety, and take control of this vital industry. We cannot devolve that to any government or its regulators. ■

holds will "never again" face major water bill hikes. But when questioned, he said it was merely "the intention" that the reforms would ensure there was enough investment to prevent a repeat of the recent increase.

Our bills fund more than investment though. The total pay of water company chief executives in England and Wales rose by 5 per cent to reach £15 million in 2024-25, an average of £1.1 million each. The highest-paid was the CEO of Severn Trent: she got £3.3 million during the financial year. The biggest pay increase went to the CEO of Affinity Water: an extra £844,000, doubling his total pay to £1.6 million.

Ofwat banned six companies from paying bonuses to their chief executives and

After years of bluster and unrealistic charges, not to speak of the voices are questioning the logic of the reckless obsession

Is the tide turning on net



Waste of space: unused charging spaces at a Sainsbury's in Worcester.

Lee Hudson/alamy.com

FOR DECADES, successive governments have used “combatting climate change” as a fig leaf for their relentless onslaught on British industry.

The current Labour government has, if anything, escalated the attack, with enormous wind turbines and sprawling so-called solar farms despoiling the countryside and eating up valuable agricultural land.

At the same time, Energy Secretary Ed Miliband continues to oppose new licences for oil and gas exploration in the North Sea, despite extensive reserves waiting to be tapped.

In addition, the virtual doubling of tax-

ation rates on existing oil and gas profits has driven many former licence holders away. As with so many initiatives supposedly designed to increase government revenue, the effect has been the reverse.

Judges

And now High Court judges have nailed their colours to the net zero wagon. They have ruled in favour of an earlier decision by the North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA) to close the Gryphon floating production, storage and offloading platform, which sits over a large oil and gas field off the coast of northern Scotland.

French company Total Energies, look-

ing to escape the punitive tax regime imposed on North Sea production, wanted to cut its losses and close the platform. The NSTA ruling was opposed by Nobel Upstream, which uses Gryphon to store output from its own fields.

The consequences of this High Court judgement are far reaching. Five oil and gas fields will be decommissioned, 200 jobs lost, the equivalent of 9 million barrels of oil reserves abandoned, and £150 million lost from Treasury revenue.

It comes just after another Grangemouth chemical plant announced that hugely uncompetitive energy prices put its survival at risk. Olefins and Polymer

Shock of soaring energy costs for consumers, influential with the net zero dogma...

Net zero?

(O and P), the largest such plant in Britain, looks to be following in the footsteps of the Ineos oil refinery which ceased production earlier in the year. O and P produces raw materials used by hundreds of plastics companies. The impact of its loss would be on a national scale, and the effect on the Falkirk area would be devastating.

Viable

But despite Miliband's efforts to block all North Sea production, he is not getting it all his own way. BP has announced plans to revive the Murlach field, discovered in 1986, but abandoned in 2004 as uneconomic. Now, thanks to advances in technology, it is viable again.

The Murlach field is estimated to contain recoverable reserves of 25.9 million barrels of oil and 600 million cubic meters of gas. It is expected to have a production life of 11 years. That's 20,000 barrels of oil and 17 million cubic feet of gas per day which we wouldn't need to import at huge cost. And how much more could be produced if these new techniques were to be deployed on other fields, previously considered spent?

Unaffordable

Many businesses were initially more than happy to toe the party line on net zero when they thought there was profit to be made — witness the scramble to promote electric vehicles, install heat pumps in

houses etc. But with unaffordable energy costs, along with a general unwillingness to put all our eggs into the net zero basket, British people remain highly sceptical.

Ola Kallenius, head of Mercedes Benz, has warned that the car industry faces a crisis if the outright ban on new petrol and diesel cars by 2035 is not modified. Writing in the German newspaper *Handelsblatt*, he said, "We need to do a reality check. Otherwise we'll drive full tilt into a wall." BMW has also urged that the 2035 ban be delayed.

Another such reality check has prompted the Danish energy company Ørsted, the largest offshore wind developer in the world, to completely rethink its offshore wind plans. Having transitioned from oil and gas to focus on renewables, Ørsted was touted as the trailblazer in green technologies and was held up as proof that wind power was the future.

Bailout

But ever since the days of low cost lending came to an end, Ørsted's debts began to climb. In order to prop up its balance sheet, the company is calling on Danish tax payers to bail it out to the equivalent of £7 billion. What was once a source of national pride has become a laughing stock.

Yet again we see the economics of alternative energy production unravelling. The combination of high cost borrowing, and energy costs distorted by the ever-

'Yet again we see the economics of alternative energy production unravelling...'

mounting subsidies (which Miliband refuses to acknowledge) means that projects are being abandoned as businesses come to realise there is no holy grail. And if there is no prospect of a return on their investment, their green enthusiasm evaporates.

There will undoubtedly come a time when the contribution of renewables to the energy mix will keep the lights on and the machines running. Human creativity and problem solving has already seen great advances in clean air, less emitting engines, improved batteries etc. But not nearly enough to meet the demands of a modern industrial economy.

Time to face reality. If all these schemes are propped up by massive subsidies, they are unviable, they cannot stand on their own two feet. It's high time we demanded the drive for net zero at all costs be replaced by a drive to restore our industrial foundations. ■



CPBML public meeting

Wednesday 15 October, London, 7.30pm

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

"No to NATO/EU war!"

The ruling class uses war overseas to divert from its problems at home. But the British working class can best act as force for peace by calling for an end to foreign adventures and interference. All welcome. Free entry. For details, see www.cpbml.org.uk/events

Capitalists have never wanted to pay workers who through no fault of their own are unable to work. The priority, though, is not better benefits.

Welfare and work



Wellcome Collection (Public domain)

The Workhouse, Poland Street, Soho: the interior. Coloured aquatint by T. Sunderland after A. C. Pugin and T. Rowlandson, 1809.

SOCIETY NEEDS workers. Work by hand and brain produces what is needed for existence, which includes the safety net of welfare payments for when workers are sick or otherwise not able to work.

Capitalism relies on un- and under-employment (Marx's "reserve army of labour") to ensure workers are kept on their toes, in competition with each other for jobs and pay.

Currently capitalists hope that AI will replace many jobs, just as power looms replaced hand loom weavers, and many similar changes. Employers keep the drudgery of manual or clerical labour, especially while there are plenty of workers

available – until the point when they introduce new machines, or these days IT.

Discarded

Then those workers and their accumulated skills are discarded and replaced with workers who they hope will be cheaper or less skilled. But it does not work like that. Power looms also take skill to build and operate, just different from handlooms, and one worker with a machine can produce far more than what went before.

What's happening now with AI is little different. While it can be used to create new drugs and engineering designs that would have been impossible or very diffi-

cult a short time ago, it also replaces call centres and similar processes with automation that aims to keep consumers, customers and other businesses at bay.

Work becomes fragmented and even more alienating – with home working, outsourcing, contractors, dispersed production and delivery all enabled by technology which should be a great benefit to workers and society. But workers do not control it – and until they do, changes to production will enslave rather than liberate.

And employers don't want to have to pay workers who, for whatever reason, aren't working.

What of those not in work – whether

h illness – or because there is no work for them – are It is work for all who can...

temporary or permanent, voluntary or not? Workers fought for, and now expect, to be paid more than is just necessary to live each week and not to be left destitute when not working. The higher wages and secure jobs they achieved are the antithesis of the gig economy (which is not “modern” at all, but echoes the worst aspects of casual work in the past).

Along with these achievements, built on workplace struggle, other benefits were won – like the old age pension in 1909 (paid at 70 then, reduced later and now heading back that way). Unemployment and sickness benefit started with workers’ mutual organisations (because they earned enough to put some away). Only later did the state take responsibility.

Undermined

The capitalist class especially doesn’t like it that retired people are living longer so it wants an increased state pension age and makes perpetual demands to reduce the cost of pensions. And despite the rhetoric that “we” must save for retirement, governments and employers have been undermining the value of occupational pensions for decades.

Welfare “benefits” now come in a wide range – unemployment, income support, sickness, disability support, housing support, retirement pensions, and a whole lot more. The simple idea of a regular contribution entitling payments is long gone.

This progress was not given by benevolent employers, but wrung out of them over decades. Yet the strategy of ensuring that workers can live in dignity when sick or retired isn’t a substitute for the struggle for jobs and skill – or the fight for wages.

The ruling class and their governments have always sought to undermine and restrict benefits, almost as soon as they are won. That reaction is unchanged from the eighteenth century, when they would not pay the poor rate (“workers are lazy and that’s why they are poor, they don’t deserve support”).

This developed into the hated workhouses, which lasted until the third decade of the twentieth century – fresh in the memories of workers as the welfare state evolved after World War Two.

Workers who aren’t gainfully employed are now said to be the problem, a drag on growth and productivity. The list is wide: older workers who won’t go back to work; feckless youth who are always sick; disabled workers who want unreasonable adjustments.

Employers try to evade responsibility – blaming workers for the shortcomings of capitalism, which only seeks to exploit for profit. Opportunity and potential contribution to the wealth of the country are not considerations – and ultimately jobs are moved out of Britain.

All attempts to cut benefits and the cost of welfare by tightening conditions and reducing funding end up in confusion and disaster, such as that caused by the current Labour government. But this is just a continuation of the universal credit shambles of its Coalition and Conservative predecessors.

Yet workers and their unions can become sidetracked with demands for better benefits as an end in themselves. Demands for “fairness” in the face of arbitrary cuts to benefits cannot be substituted for the fight for wages and jobs. Neither should unions seek to keep those able to work on benefits – rebuilding requires the

‘Demands for “fairness” in the face of arbitrary cuts to benefits cannot be substituted for the fight for wages and jobs...’

energy and commitment of all.

Of course it is right to criticise and fight capricious decisions like the cut to winter fuel allowance. But these are only defensive actions when set against the real underlying issues – in that instance rising energy costs and benefits not keeping up with inflation.

Workers must demand work and wages, to acquire skills and to be able to use them. Adequate benefits and welfare can’t be set aside from or prioritised over that. ■

Meet the Party

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist’s series of public, in-person meetings continues on Wednesday 15 October in London – on NATO’s drive to war, which is being urged on by Keir Starmer. All meeting details are published on What’s On, page 5, as well as in our eNewsletter, and at cpbml.org.uk/events.

M The CPBML will be having a stall at the Battle of Ideas Festival in Church House, Westminster, over the weekend of 18 and 19 October. If you are attending, come and find us. We’d love to talk. Use the code BOIF-CPBML to get 20 per cent off tickets at Eventbrite.

M As well as our in-person meetings, we hold regular Zoom discussion meetings – the next one, on the working class and trade unions, is on 9 September at 7pm. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation. We also run 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.

Workers want shorter waiting lists for NHS treatment, and timeframe. That's a long way off...

Another plan? The NHS



Workers

Urgent care: waits in accident and emergency departments rise and rise.

to be able to see a real doctor in a reasonable needs a rebuild

MILLIONS OF potential patients are unable to access the care that they require, whether elective, emergency, mental health, or maternity. Why? Because the service lacks the beds, doctors and nurses to serve the population, to help those of working age who are sick back to productive work, and to care for the old, the young, and those at the end of life.

Frustrated by the impossibility of making an appointment to see a GP, many patients turned to accident and emergency departments, the always-open front door of the NHS. Waits in emergency departments continue to rise: the Royal College of Emergency Medicine drew attention to the latest performance data from NHS England, which shows that 122,852 patients faced a wait of 12 hours or more last month. This is the second highest number for the month of July since records began in 2010. And in Scotland 51,400 older patients endured stays of 12 hours or more last year.

As for planned care, there are several minimum targets and operational standards currently set for waiting times, reflecting each area's policies and needs. The targets are generally not achieved anywhere:

- In England, 92 per cent of patients should not wait longer than 18 weeks from referral to treatment (RTT).
- In Scotland, 95 per cent of patients should be seen at a new outpatient appointment within 12 weeks of referral, and 100 per cent of patients should wait no longer than 12 weeks for treatment as an inpatient or day case.
- In Wales, 95 per cent of patients should start treatment following referral within a 26-week target.

Against this backdrop, in July the government published *The 10 Year Health Plan for England: fit for the future*.

NHS workers and patients have probably lost count of the number of times NHS plans and strategies have promised a better future. We've had devolving more care into the community, this time through new "neighbourhood health centres". Then IT solutions would magically manage increasing demand for services, in this case a new NHS app and the application of AI. And not

forgetting proposals to move from treating sickness to practising preventative medicine. All of these have been couched in the peculiar management speak that the consulting firms have made their specialty, and which holds the most senior NHS managers in thrall.

In principle, any plan is welcome, rather than relying on the anarchy of the market. The 2023 *NHS Long Term Workforce Plan* was a welcome recognition that the NHS could no longer rely on poaching doctors and nurses from abroad, but must educate and train our own. Elsewhere in this issue of *Workers* we report on how newly qualified professionals, desperately needed in hospitals, clinics and general practices, are unable to find posts.

Medical Royal Colleges, responding to the latest plan, expressed caution and several drew attention to the need to expand specialty training. The Royal College of Anaesthetists pointed out that in 2024 there were 25,496 doctors applying for just 12,743 training posts.

A big conversation?

The plan promises, or threatens, a "big conversation" on changes to the NHS staff contracts, with suggestions of a new "opt-in" "ultra-flexible" staff contract offering pay-for-performance bonuses.

The plan also predicts that in ten years' time the NHS will run on fewer staff, an aspiration described as concerning by the Royal College of Physicians who said, "The suggestion that staff numbers in 2035 will be lower than those projected in the 2023 *Long Term Workforce Plan* is concerning. We know we don't have enough staff currently to meet demand – AI and tech alone won't solve the problem of capacity." NHS workers now await a refresh, so-called, of the *Long Term Workforce Plan*, and will be vigilant to ensure that gains already won are not eroded.

After years of development, the NHS App was launched in January 2019 as a front door to digitally enabled health services, but its functionality was basic and limited. Patient access to their health records was also limited, and often required registering with a third-party commercial provider.

'There are several minimum targets and operational standards for waiting times. The targets are generally not achieved anywhere...'

A study published in January in *BMC Medicine* found that what patients expected as added value from the app often did not materialise in day to day practice. It is not yet clear that any revamped version of the app would result in the "doctor in your pocket" the plan claimed.

And while AI clearly has a role in health, for example in applying its ability to process large amounts of data to the initial screening of diagnostic images, according to an Academy of Medical Royal Colleges report *Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare*, there is a "tension between the tech mantra, 'move fast and break things' and the principle enshrined in the Hippocratic Oath, 'First, do no harm'".

Some elements of the plan look backwards rather than forwards. The plan revives the intention of the Conservative health secretary Andrew Lansley that every NHS provider should be a foundation trust, this time by 2035.

Foundation trusts will no longer be required to have governors. League tables return, which are supposed to inform patient choice. Choice, an obsession of health secretaries, does not loom large in patients' real-world priorities. Evidence suggests that, although patients respond positively when asked in the abstract if they would like more choice in their care, their real-life behaviour when they need care

Continued on page 14



Continued from page 13

shows a preference for the hospital, practice or clinic nearby.

Although previous attempts to create a “primary care-led NHS” have led nowhere, the issue needs tackling. The proposal to establish Neighbourhood Health Centres isn’t a bad one; it’s a slightly reworked version of the 150 polyclinics proposed in Lord Darzi’s *NHS Next Stage Review*. These were popular, but in some cases the number of walk-in patients far exceeded expectations, without reducing pressure elsewhere in the system, and polyclinics were aborted by Lansley’s 2012 Health and Social Care Act, before they could be allowed to work properly.

Integration

Key to planning is integration, and integration is key to control of all of the NHS, including primary care. This means that general practices and general practitioners have to be integrated, not stand at one remove. Getting GPs centrally contracted has often been seen as a diversion. But that needs to be revisited as it may be the rock on which the plan will founder.

As the plan’s Multi Neighbourhood Providers develop, they will be attractive for capitalists looking for profits, as has happened with large groups of veterinary practices. This would be far worse for the NHS than the current position under which GPs are self-employed contractors.

The plan makes no attempt to address the fundamental problem, that workers are unable to receive the care they need when they need it. The move towards a preventative, primary care-led service will fail. Many

of the ways that the minister suggests to achieve this are impractical or ill-directed. Others border on fantasy, more PR than anything else.

The failures of the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales mean that the same issues and problems exist there too. The authorities in Cardiff and Edinburgh complain, inaccurately, about insufficient support from central government in order to gloss over their own failings.

When the NHS was established in 1948, in Scotland it was set up as a separate entity with its own legislation: the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1947. Northern Ireland likewise had its own legislation. Wales was part of a single system with England for the first 20 years of the NHS. In 1969, responsibility for the NHS in Wales was passed to the Secretary of State for Wales from the Secretary of State for Health, who was thereafter just responsible for the NHS in England.

Lack of confidence

In November 2022 a survey by Ipsos and the Health Foundation found that just 28 per cent of the Scottish public were confident about their devolved administration’s plans for the NHS. For Wales, just 19 per cent were confident.

The geography of Wales means that there are areas where cross-border arrangements are necessary. The population of north Wales is too small to support specialist units, so patients travel to Liverpool and Manchester. There are no large hospitals in Mid Wales at all.

Scotland has even more remote areas, and access to hospitals can mean several hours driving. There have even been trials of drones to deliver medical goods to remote areas and islands.

The fragmentation of the NHS across Britain means different healthcare policies, commissioning processes and patient data systems for planned care; these affect the data coverage available on referral to treatment or stage of treatment waiting lists, and the extent to which data can be compared across the NHS in Britain, whether that is in England, Wales, or Scotland.

England, Wales and Scotland have each announced (at different times) the use

‘The plan tries to address financial need without addressing the reality that the NHS is adrift in a swamp of capitalism...’

of the private sector in an attempt to reduce waiting lists. It is an admission of failure. NHS Scotland has now ended the use of the private sector in this way, yet around 29 per cent of Scots accessed private treatment in the last two years, often making sacrifices to do so.

The sections in the plan on finance are weak. Why? Because they try to address the financial need without addressing the reality that the NHS is adrift in a swamp of capitalism. Real integration requires the people to take control, integrating NHS finances as part of a whole system in which those who produce control the money they create.

A survey carried out in 2023 (the NHS’s 75th anniversary) but reported in March 2024 showed that despite record low levels of satisfaction with the NHS (24 per cent), public support for its founding principles is as strong as ever. The overwhelming majority expressed high levels of support for the principles when asked if they should still apply in 2023: that it is free of charge when you need it (91 per cent), primarily funded through taxation (82 per cent) and available to all (82 per cent).

There was much talk of reform from Starmer. Even the previous government mentioned reform. The NHS, like the country as a whole, doesn’t need reforming, it needs rebuilding. To try to rescue the NHS while ignoring the country and the economy it lives in and for is the plan’s biggest defect. ■

Borrowing is on the rise, and debt interest is a big part of government expenditure...

Britain in the red



More and more of Britain's wealth is going to service debt – instead of investment.

FIGURES RELEASED by the Office for National Statistics at the end of July were remarkable for the increases in government debt – and for the increases in the amount of money the government is having to spend to service that debt.

The Treasury had to borrow £20.7 billion in June 2025 – a rise of 46 per cent compared with June 2024. Meanwhile, interest payments in June 2025 totalled £16.4 billion, almost double the figure of £8.4 billion in June 2024.

To put those figures into context, just the increase in interest repayments in June alone would be enough to pay for the full restitution of the winter fuel allowance for 18 years.

Government debt in itself is not necessarily a bad thing. Even ballooning debt needn't be problematic. It's all a question of why the debt is being incurred – and how the government plans to pay for it.

The problem in Britain is that the debt is rising because a stagnating economy is not delivering enough in terms of income tax and corporation tax. And to make matters worse, Labour's Treasury has chosen a route that can only increase stagnation: to increase taxes and hold down public investment until the debt declines, at least as a proportion of GDP. That fits with British capitalism's long-held aversion to investment.

Accelerating decline

It's an approach that, in practice, seeks to deal with decline by accelerating decline. A paper from the Office for Budget Responsibility forecast that public sector investment would fall from a miserly 2.5 per cent of GDP in 2023-2024 to 1.75 per cent by the end of the decade. That's a far cry from the 4.5 per cent of GDP that was the average level of public sector investment

'To make matters worse, Labour has chosen a route that can only increase stagnation...'

from 1949 to 1978.

A chunk of the decline in investment was due to the large-scale privatisation of the utilities. Despite claims that privatisation would enable the injection of private finance, capital expenditure by the water and sewage companies for example was less in 2021 than it was in 1991 – without accounting for inflation of 73 per cent over the period.

Britain's finance capital would rather do anything than invest in production. Yet the truth is that the only way to stabilise the economy – let alone improve it – is to expand production through improving productivity, and that cannot be done without investment.

Overall, the economy grew at about 0.5 per cent a year between 2010 and 2022, measured in output per hour – insufficient even to keep pace with Britain's rapidly increasing population. The only reason that GDP over the period rose by slightly more (it actually went up by an average of 1.2 per cent a year) is that people have been working longer hours.

As the Productivity Institute wrote in 2023, the increase in hours worked has contributed more to GDP than improvements in productivity. "Many UK firms have been following an unsustainable low wage, low investment, low productivity path," it said.

That's a recipe for the debt to grow.

Meanwhile, local government debt continues to mushroom as well. Research by *The Times*, using Freedom of Information Act requests, published on 18 August revealed that interest payments on council debts account on average for £1 out of every £5 raised in council tax. The figure has gone up 65 per cent since 2015. ■

Our class and our country are bound up with industry, that civilised society. Industry embodies our independence and

Industry. It's our life blood

SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS have deliberately attacked our industry to destroy our organised working class. The deindustrialisation of Britain caused the steepest decline in manufacturing jobs among G7 countries.

It left former industrial regions bereft of jobs. Military contracts became the last source of manufacturing jobs in many areas. Governments gave subsidies to multinational companies in low-paid service industries to get rid of better-paid, unionised manufacturing jobs.

They told us that we didn't need industry, that finance would make us all rich. Capital deserted industry and went to the finance sector where there were easier, richer pickings. As an example close to home, my father started his working life as an engineer, on a key project I'll mention later. Then he inherited his father's engineering business. After many years he sold it, and went into buying and selling property and into speculating on the stock market. From industry to finance.

In 1999, we still had over four million workers in manufacturing, now just 2.5 million. Production in key areas has declined sharply.

Steel

Steel production has fallen from 12 million tonnes in 2013 to 4 million in 2024. And between 2021 and 2024 chemical output fell 37 per cent.

The Brexit referendum aroused hopes of self-reliance, a rebirth of British industry, a rejection of anti-industry policies and culture. I remember asking one of my sons about what he'd learnt in school that day. They had been discussing factories and he'd learnt what factories produced – apparently, what they produced was – pollution.

Manufacturing industry is vital to raising living standards, to national defence, and to national independence. And now that Britain is independent again, we can use state aid to invest in industry and services,

• This article is an edited extract from the introduction to a CPBML public meeting in London in July.



Danny Lawson/PA Images

Hot end rolling mill at British Steel, Scunthorpe.

massively invest in necessary infrastructure like HS2, HS3 and Crossrail.

But still the City of London and finance capital control every government. While we allow finance capital to decide policy, we will not be able to gain the benefits of independence. We should make finance serve industry, to change society so that no longer will all our governments take their orders from finance capital.

Energy

There can be no industry without energy. But our factories pay about 50 per cent more for it than in Germany and France,

and four times more than in the United States. The cost of power for industrial businesses in Britain has more than doubled, increasing 124 percent in just five years, according to government figures. Iron and steel were hardest hit – the average plant's energy bill up 80 per cent.

The government continues to oppose issuing licences for new exploration in the North Sea, despite our reliance on gas and oil as part of the mix of energy sources.

The Lindsey oil refinery at Immingham, in North Lincolnshire, has fallen into insolvency, putting 400 jobs at risk. This follows the closure of Grangemouth near Falkirk in

It is, the work we do to produce the goods that make a
 d our national unity...

od.



Scotland, leaving Britain now with only four oil refineries, down from 18 in the 1970s.

The electricity market allows natural gas power plants to demand exorbitant prices whenever the system needs to be balanced at short notice, when they're paid to be on standby. Gas sets power prices most of the time. The result is unjustified economic rents to the gas companies. This will go on as long as we let gas companies run the market.

The government has announced, with great fanfare, its industrial strategy. This prioritises eight sectors – advanced manufacturing, clean energy, creative industries,

defence, digital and technologies, financial services, life sciences, and professional and business services. Eight priorities? Should an industrial strategy really prioritise financial services, and professional and business services?

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is to get £3.8 billion more in its annual capital budget – by 2029. The Department for Transport is to get only £1.8 billion more – a real terms cut.

These sums are dwarfed by the £14 billion extra on defence this year, rising to an extra £38.6 billion by 2035, and the £9 billion extra to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. The transition to net zero is to cost £803 billion between now and 2050 – £32 billion a year.

Infrastructure

The National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority said that infrastructure investment will have to rise to between £70 and £80 billion a year in the 2030s. Over half of this is supposed to come from private investment.

This repeats Labour's private finance initiatives of the 2000s. Hundreds of PFI projects are still deep in debt and stuck in legal disputes.

We need investment in public infrastructure such as new roads, railways, or technology in universities. But PFI didn't work last time round. Will it really work this time round?

CND's recent Alternative Defence Review made the point that different sectors of production have different effects on the wider economy. For example, spending on rail has a bigger economic multiplier than military spending.

Investing in health creates two and half times more jobs than military spending. Public spending on education also creates more jobs than military contracts.

But does this mean that we should end any spending that creates fewer jobs than other sectors do? Of course not. The comparisons are of interest, but they don't tell us what we need to produce. Surely Britain needs its defence industry to be able to defend ourselves.

Producing fighter jets, nuclear submarines, warships, missiles, drones, and

'Should an industrial strategy really prioritise financial services, and professional and business services?'

other weapons may not create as many jobs as health spending does. But it still brings economic benefits, from the spending by the workers and from technological spin-offs, which CND – curiously – failed to mention.

But with foreign ownership of our defence industries, all too many of these benefits go abroad. High profits are extracted but not reinvested in Britain.

The defence sector's biggest firm, BAE Systems, is in effect a joint US and British company. A near majority of its capital is invested in the USA, and most of its major shareholders are US investment companies.

There are 164,000 jobs in the defence industry, around five per cent of the total working in manufacturing. For towns like Barrow-in-Furness, where BAE employs 9,500 workers, defence jobs are crucial.

The world's very first jet engine was produced in Britain, as part of our World War Two defence effort. Building the first fighter jet pioneered the civil aviation industry. On a personal note, my father was one of the engineering team at Power Jets, led by Sir Frank Whittle. So secret was this work that he wasn't allowed to tell anyone – not even anyone in his family – what work he was doing.

Finally, we need to invest in all our manufacturing industries, from steel to data centres, invest in skills – in our universities and colleges, and in apprenticeships. All are vital, all help to develop Britain as a civilised society, an industrial society. ■

The battle lines in the global trade wars over critical minerals phasing out of diesel and electric, Britain – and British workers

Trade wars and the threat



Workers

Ships at Felixstowe docks, which handles almost half of Britain's containerised trade.

A SERIES of reports in the *Financial Times* in July underlined how British industry suffers when distant capitalist powers go to war over trade. Among the most fought-over commodities in the 21st century are the metals and rare earths needed to manufacture steel and magnets.

The *FT* claims that political tensions between the US and Asia (mainly, but not solely, China) have led to the stockpiling and weaponisation of critical materials, with consequent financial turbulence as costs soar and dive.

The automotive industry warns of shortages that could force factory closures in Britain and elsewhere. China's stockpiling of high-purity nickel, and its restrictions on the export of strategic minerals such as rare earths and graphite, have been widely reported.

Indonesia too has put a ban on the export of nickel. Indian automakers have cut production. Mining giant Glencore notes that much of the Congo's cobalt may remain unsold by 2025 due to export bans. Almost all critical materials are imported

into Britain, with inevitable risks to security of supply.

The rising cost of raw materials and the flood of cheap, but hi-tech, Chinese electric vehicles onto the European market threaten companies such as Nissan and Ford. At present jobs at Nissan Sunderland and other car plants in Britain hang by a thread. Sales to both China and the US have declined. Several Ford models have been discontinued and 800 jobs at Bridgend are to go by the end of 2027.

Claims that great progress has been

erals are being drawn. With the government enforcing the
rkers – are dangerously exposed...

nt to jobs

made in the production of electric vehicles look premature. Without the materials, not only the car industry but all manufacturing will grind to a halt. No materials, no production, no work, no growth – no paying off the nation's mounting debt.

Blame for this must equally be laid at the door of British governments, with their policies of enforced phasing out of petrol and diesel by 2035 and allowing high-grade steel production to move abroad.

Capitalists are not hard-wired to cooperate with each other. However, the *FT* reports that alarm at the scale of China's stockpiling has prompted ideas among industrialists of price-setting and a joint buying mechanism to protect profits.

Allies would commit to purchasing materials at certain minimum prices. At the G7 summit in June participants pledged to develop "standards-based markets" for critical materials, seen as a first step to compete with Chinese state support, which has a reputation for keeping prices affordable by ignoring environmental and labour standards.

South African Neal Froneman, founder of loss-making platinum producer Sibanye-Stillwater, pointed out the obvious when he lamented to the *FT*, "We incur higher costs, and we have higher costs of capital...the model is that it's a western-world, capitalist system. Shareholders require returns."

As the *FT* points out, "the most striking aspect of China's weaponisation of rare earths is how unprepared western governments and companies were." Manufacturers "keep only a week's supply of rare earths in their inventories."

Beijing has upped the ante, forcing the EU and the US to take measures to boost their own supplies. This has exposed the government as lagging. Britain has negligible amounts of rare earths, but is rich in non-critical basic minerals. If the government were truly interested in Britain's technological development it would have taken steps long ago to build and retain a metals industry. Instead it has been happy to rely on the US or the EU (themselves ill-equipped), as well as China and Australasia.

China's domination of materials and supply routes clearly has a knock-on effect

on jobs. Workers are rightly wary. But government's first duty should be towards its own population.

A critical minerals strategy drawn up by the British government as late as 2022 consisted of barely more than a list of chemical elements, with no significant direction as to their use. Little or no support was offered by governments to encourage mining or refining of these minerals.

Successive governments consistently avoided the question of self-sufficiency through industry. It came as little surprise that, when the Critical Minerals Intelligence Centre was set up in 2022, led by the British Geological Survey, the primary goal was not developing modern technology but meeting net zero targets.

Modern industry such as the manufacture of quantum computers and supercomputers, not to mention defence and basic infrastructure, came third in importance after recycling.

The Centre points to six industrial sectors dependent on rare earths and other critical minerals, including agriculture, computing, construction and aerospace.

The unpreparedness of Britain, the EU, and the US raises a paradoxical question: are capitalists right to accuse a country of weaponisation of resources by withholding them for their own domestic use? Or –

'Successive governments consistently avoided the question of self-sufficiency through industry...'

more to the point from a worker's perspective – should not national governments like ours stand accused of neglect of their own industries, a form of weaponisation against the working class?

A radical revamp of the UK Critical Minerals Strategy is due out in late summer 2025. It may shed more light on the matter. According to the Critical Minerals Intelligence Centre it is intended to be based exclusively on Britain's particular geopolitical and economic vulnerability. It should confirm that as technology evolves the materials designated as critical are literally the material base of Britain's economy. ■



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Why have peace talks between Ukraine and Russia been so difficult since the invasion in February 2022? The answer: NATO...

US provocation and war in Ukraine



Workers

Demonstration outside US Embassy, London, January 2025.

Provoked: how Washington started the new cold war with Russia and the catastrophe in Ukraine, by Scott Horton, paperback, 678 pages, ISBN 978-1733647373, Libertarian Institute, 2024, £23.63. Kindle edition available.

NATO ENDLESSLY repeats that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was unprovoked. So insistent is this assertion that it must make anyone ask whether NATO is protesting too much. In this extraordinary book, Scott Horton details exactly how the US government led NATO into provoking Russia to wage an unnecessary war against Ukraine.

Over the years NATO promised repeatedly not to extend to the east. After meeting US Secretary of State James Baker in 1990, the West German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher said there was no intention of doing so.

At the time Genscher was deeply involved in the process of German reunification and he sought to reassure the USSR about the outcome. A few days after their

meeting, Baker directly and categorically told Mikhail Gorbachev, then president of the Soviet Union, that even if the United States kept its presence in Germany as part of NATO (which of course it was intending to do), then "...not an inch of NATO's present military jurisdiction will spread in an eastward direction."

Jack Matlock, former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, stated, "we gave categorical assurances to Gorbachev back when the Soviet Union existed that if a united Germany was able to stay in NATO, NATO would not be moved eastward."

Expansion

Matlock summed up, "there would have been no basis for the present crisis if there had been no expansion of the alliance following the end of the Cold War, or if the expansion had occurred in harmony with building a security structure in Europe that included Russia."

NATO was purportedly created to guard against the supposed threat from the

USSR, but it showed its true aggressive nature as it broke all its pledges. It added more and more countries to NATO, brushing aside Russia's protests.

The NATO powers pledged to get Ukraine into NATO, knowing full well that no Russian government could accept this.

US Professor John Mearsheimer presciently warned in 2015, "The West is leading Ukraine down the primrose path, and the end result is Ukraine is going to get wrecked."

In 2023, NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg admitted the war was launched in response to NATO's encroachment. He said Russian President Vladimir Putin presented a draft treaty which promised no more NATO enlargement as a precondition for not invading Ukraine. Stoltenberg added, "Of course we didn't sign that...So he went to war to prevent NATO, more NATO, close to his borders."

Negotiations blocked

After Russia's forces invaded on 24 February 2022, President Volodymyr Zelensky briefly backed peace talks. But then NATO, with Boris Johnson pushing hardest, told him not to. Horton records that a former UN assistant secretary-general said that NATO decided at its special summit on 24 March 2022 to oppose these peace negotiations. Zelensky defended the preliminary results of the Ukrainian-Russian peace negotiation for a few days longer, then gave in to NATO pressures and opted for a continuation of the war.

But President Zelensky only rules on sufferance. A group calling itself the Capitulation Resistance Movement arose in 2019 and is still influential. Under the guise of being pro-democracy, it opposes all moves towards peace. It accuses Zelensky of being a "servant of the Kremlin" and of trying to "strike a deal with the devil". He has faced several overt death threats from Ukraine's neo-Nazis if he does not hold out for total victory, for the full restoration of the country's territorial integrity.

The neo-Nazis hold Zelensky hostage, preventing any peace negotiations, any peace agreement. They are doing what NATO wants, and NATO is doing what the

so difficult ever

in Europe

‘Putin made a serious mistake in allowing NATO to provoke him into launching an invasion...’

neo-Nazis want. Together they decide his policy, and therefore – together – they decide NATO’s policy. In effect, NATO is letting Ukraine’s neo-Nazis hold all of us hostage, binding us into a forever war in Ukraine, against Russia.

And Zelensky is powerless to do anything about extensive and widely reported corruption. The EU interferes, trying to impose itself on what’s happening inside the country in the name of democracy – as it does everywhere. The more likely reality is that this is a symptom of an internal power struggle.

The other big lie is that President Putin, if not checked in Ukraine, will go on to attack other European countries. But even US war advocate Robert Kagan conceded, “... there is no way that Putin’s conquest of Ukraine has any immediate or even distant effect on American security.”

Nor is it any threat to Britain’s security. Putin is not a new Hitler. There has only ever been one Hitler – thankfully. But Putin made a serious mistake in allowing NATO to provoke him into launching an invasion, costing the lives of over a million Russians.

Yet NATO, with the Labour government pushing hardest, is preparing for a forever war. In September 2024, NATO members agreed a ten-year plan to rebuild the Ukrainian defence industry.

By contrast, the peoples of the NATO member countries want peace. In summer 2024, 94 per cent of the American people, and 88 per cent of Europeans, said they wanted a negotiated settlement. And in February 2024, 72 per cent of Ukrainians said the same. ■

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In 1787, at the outset of the industrial revolution, Glasgow organised. Six were killed and many injured. They are not forgotten.

1787: The Calton weavers

THE CALTON Weavers commemorative campaign is building towards the 240th anniversary of the killing of striking workers and the wounding of many more, in the Calton area of Glasgow in 1787.

Annual events, this year on 31 August, featuring talks, music and poetry will lead to a major commemoration and memorial unveiling in 2027.

Frederick Engels placed the beginning of Britain's industrial revolution to the middle of the 18th century. He based his view on two main advances in science, the invention of the steam engine and the development of machines for use in spinning and weaving.

Workers in Scotland had rejected feudalism and the Stewart dynasty in 1745; they found themselves at the forefront of the emergent industrial revolution. Tailors were on strike in Edinburgh in 1748 and in Aberdeen in 1763, followed by the weavers of Paisley in 1773. But it was the strike action of the weavers of the Calton area of Glasgow in 1787 that marked the start of an organised labour movement.

Over 20,000 hand-loom weavers were at work in the west of Scotland in the 1780s. The cloth they produced formed a major part of Glasgow's commercial success, the growth of its merchants' riches and the expansion of the city.

Exploitation

The new capitalist class benefited from the trans-Atlantic "triangular trade" combining cotton, tobacco and slaves. The outcome

for workers was increased exploitation. These were the days before the power loom: whole families including children worked in the largely home-based industry.

Within the concentrated working population solidarity grew and the workers became a powerful force. Calton in the east end of Glasgow had such a workforce. It was there in the 1730s that the workers had formed their first associations. Other areas of Glasgow followed – Anderston in 1738, Pollokshaws in 1749 and Govan in 1756. In 1761 the weavers in Fenwick, south of Glasgow, formed the first co-operative society in Britain.

Deadly attack

In 1787 early capitalism was in crisis. The import of cheap muslin from India caused prices to plummet – leaving weavers working longer for less pay.

After wages were cut by a quarter, they held a mass rally in June 1787 at Glasgow Green (where workers still rally today). A resolution was passed to refuse to work at the reduced rates.

Employers immediately had the strike declared illegal and offered 20 guineas to informers.

On 3 September the situation escalated, with strikers stopping scabs from accepting the low-price raw materials. The manufacturers summoned the army who attacked the strikers and surrounded the whole district overnight.

Six workers died of gunshots and many more were wounded: 6,000 strikers attended their burial. Mass arrests followed including those of whole families.

One leader – James Granger – was sentenced to be whipped through the streets of Edinburgh and then banished from Scotland for 7 years. However, he returned to become a leader in the movement that led to "the great strike" associated with the Luddites in 1811-1812.

The fear of the manufacturers and the ruling class of the time can be seen in the construction of the infantry barracks that opened in 1795, strategically sited in the Gallowgate right beside the Calton district.

In contrast to the fate of the strikers, the army officers involved were given "the freedom of the city". Part of the current com-



The Calton Weavers commemoration gathering at Calton, Glasgow, September 2024.

memorative campaign is to secure the revoking of this freedom of the city. Direct descendants of the massacred weavers are demanding that Glasgow City Council overturn it, especially in the case of Lieutenant Colonel Kellet who organised the massacre.

Inspirational

Although this strike met a bloody end, its example was not forgotten by workers. By 1812 the United Committee of Framework Knitters was in existence in greater Glasgow, Nottingham, London, Derby and Dublin.

The grievances – and the spirit – of the Calton weavers were shared throughout Britain. By 1820 the Glasgow Association of Cotton Spinners had organised the workforce.

The repression of the Calton Weavers foreshadowed the events in working class history such as the 1819 Peterloo massacre, the deportation of the Tolpuddle martyrs in 1834 and the 1919 attacks on Glasgow strikers in George Square.

The efforts to commemorate and celebrate the Calton Weavers should be sup-

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at Abercrombie Street Burial Grounds on 22

ported. The events of 1787 were a watershed moment in working class history.

The 24 September 2023 Calton Weavers commemoration event, which can be found on YouTube, featured music and several speakers.

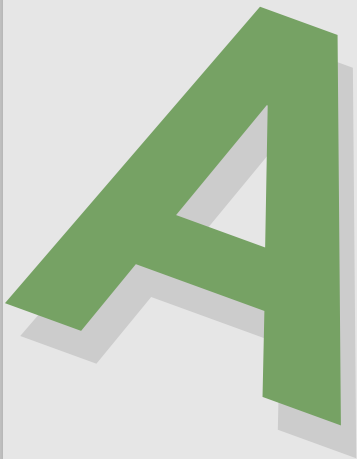
Jennifer McCarey, chair of Glasgow Trade Union Council, said, "And of course the weavers were intelligent, articulate, well organised workers. We might think of workers at this period of time as living some kind of peasant existence. In fact, not only were they educated themselves, but they saw education as essential for their colleagues and for others and they saw that as their role as fellow workers."

"So for 12 weeks they held out, with no arbitration, no tools for guidance, no legal protection, no accountability for employers – with only the solidarity of each other to rely on. The massacre was the conclusion of that."

Historian Elspeth King said at the gathering, "These brutal acts polarised the interests of the classes and the class war was truly begun in 1787." Calton Books has now reprinted her 1987 book *The Strike of the Glasgow Weavers*. ■

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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.

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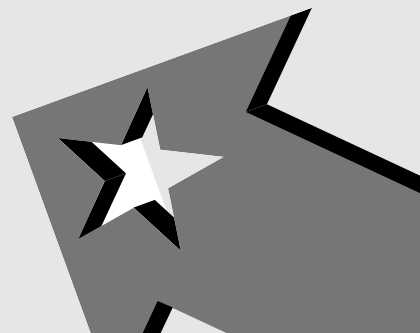
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Time to talk about immigration

'As a part of the working class taking control, as we must, we cannot permit the suppression of open debate in our workplaces and organisations on these subjects...'

ACCORDING TO the most recent figures from the Office of National Statistics, the population of England and Wales rose by 706,881 in a year, to 61.8 million by June 2024. Astonishingly, only 29,982 of that increase, 4.2 per cent, was by natural change, that is to say births, the rest was the result of net migration. A total of 1,142,303 migrants came in from abroad in that period.

David Miles from the Office for Budget Responsibility, a former member of the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee, warned that there were "serious problems" with governments relying on immigration for economic growth. He said that the priority should be getting the workers we already have into employment.

It is becoming ever clearer that global capitalism's policy to promote legal mass immigration has suppressed pay and working conditions. Successive governments have helped employers import trained workers, avoiding developing British workers' skills or investing in innovation.

This policy has kept productivity low. It has also resulted in huge strains on education, healthcare and housing, particularly in London, as reported in *Workers* earlier this year. Outside of what it needs for profit and control, the capitalist class has no interest in planning. And it has no interest in accurate knowledge about the size or composition of the working class and what it needs to survive, let alone flourish.

Britain pioneered systematic and scientific counting of the population. The statistician John Rickman in 1798, arguing for a census, noted that "an industrious population is the basic power and resource of any nation, and therefore its size needs to be known."

A quarter of the way into the 21st century, with sophisticated computers at our disposal, if Rickman were alive today he would despair at our lack of knowledge of our population, legal and illegal. Yet that knowledge is a precondition for planning the economy and public services.

British governments have shown they have no real intention of stemming illegal immigration. Rather, it is a useful diversion from the policy of successive governments to enable employers

to import workers from countries where labour is cheaper and more compliant.

By June this year, small boat crossings were up 48 per cent on the same period last year. People smuggling gangs, who appear to operate without meaningful interference, continue to launch migrants in overcrowded, unseaworthy vessels. They rely on rescue services to bring them ashore safely in Britain.

The government, too, relies on rescue. Instead of using HM Coastguard, the Border Force and the Royal Navy to return migrants to France, they put the volunteers of the RNLI, funded by charitable donations, in the front line, knowing they will never refuse a shout.

Around 30,000 asylum seekers are housed in hotels at workers' expense, making millions for hotel owners and giant capitalist firms like Serco. Residents of areas where these hotels are sited have justified misgivings, especially when asylum seekers are charged with offences such as sexual assault.

Parts of our major cities are de facto ghettos, large concentrations of migrants who would rather cling to the ways of their country of origin than join with British workers as part of a united class. For a detailed description of this, see the recent *Workers* article on Rotherham, scene of one of the worst child sexual abuse scandals, the consequence of the decay of a town once based on coal and steel.

The government's ploy of misrepresenting public discussion of these issues as "far-right" is no longer believable or believed. As a part of the working class taking control, as we must be, we cannot permit the suppression of open debate in our workplaces and organisations on these subjects.

Immigration under capitalism, whether it's legal mass immigration or illegal immigration in small boats, is an attack on workers here, and on workers in immigrants' countries of origin.

The capitalist has no allegiance to place or country but goes wherever there is greatest profit. Workers on the other hand have homes, families, real places where they work and live. These two interests are incompatible; either capitalism must go, or it will destroy us. ■

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