WORKERS

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OUT AT LAST

NOW FOR REAL CONTROL

JOURNAL OF THE CPBML

TAKE CONTROL: BUILD THE NEW BRITAIN

WORKERS

Now for real control

OUT. FINALLY. Whatever the restrictions and disruption – and these words are being written before the outcome of negotiations is clear – Britain can and must now chart its own future in the world. This is a pivotal moment.

There are no excuses any more. The choice is stark: will the working class take that control for itself or abandon it to the "free" market, globalist capital?

We always said that no deal was the best deal, and so it is. Perhaps there is a parallel universe where the EU is prepared to recognise and respect the sovereignty of countries which have the audacity to leave its bloc of failure. But in the real world, no deal the EU would be prepared to consider could conceivably have been the best deal for Britain.

It would have been better – much better – to have reckoned with this from the start. To have invoked Article 50 on the morning after the referendum. To have used time wisely, instead of wasting it on procrastination and lies.

"We're out," proclaimed David Dimbleby on BBC TV at 4.40 am on 24 June 2016 once the vote for Leave had become unassailable. But we weren't out.

First we had to endure three wasted years of duplicity from Theresa May and obstruction from MPs elected to do our bidding, of calls for a second referendum, and the treacherous Transition.

Finally, the election of December 2019 put paid to the fantasy of remaining in the EU. And as the EU's negotiating demands became ever clearer – and ever more outrageous – many who had voted to remain came to realise that leaving the EU on the EU's terms would be the worst of all possible worlds. In the dying days of the deal negotiations, the EU's overwhelming drive to punish us for daring to leave was laid bare to all.

That working class control is possible is beyond doubt. Look at how, when Covid-19 struck, in a completely unprecedented crisis, workers rapidly took over the tasks of transforming health provision, producing PPE, developing a new vaccine. We will now be free to apply the lessons from their achievements in many areas of work – among others agriculture, manufacture, technology.

The British working class – the overwhelming majority of the population – are the only class that has the national interest truly at heart. We are rooted here. It is here, within these islands, that we must have work, housing, health, and a good environment. We cannot outsource ourselves to Monaco or the Cayman Islands. We are the producers, the source of the wealth created here.

Our task, then, is that which Karl Marx laid down in the *Communist Manifesto*: to become the leading class of the nation we must first constitute ourselves as the nation. It's an idea that comes naturally to most workers – whichever way they voted in 2016.

No one will ride to the rescue of Britain and its working class, unless it be the working class itself. ■

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Contents – January/February 2021

Johnnie Packington (CC BY-SA 2.0)

BT Openreach engineer working on Superfast Cymru in Mid Wales.

BT staff yes to action vote

IN WHAT the Communications Workers Union is describing as the most important vote involving its entire BT Group membership since the 1987 national strike, members responded to a consultative ballot on industrial action in defence of job security and terms and conditions with a huge 97.9 per cent yes vote.

Turnout was high too, at 74 per cent. "For a long time BT Group has been claiming that our union does not speak for the employees and that people are happy with the direction of the company," said deputy general secretary Andy Kerr. "This result shows how laughable those claims are and have always been." Kerr said the vote should act as a "reality check" for management – and a last chance to avoid a massive industrial dispute in 2021.

Long-cherished assumptions over job security at BT have been smashed recently by a series of moves to "cease" jobs, including an announcement at the start of December of 28 jobs at risk of compulsory redundancy made provocatively while the consultative ballot was still being held.

In November BT said it would slash redundancy pay from June 2021 for long-serving employees from two years' money to one year's – then sent an email to staff saying that the proposed severance terms had been discussed with the Communications Workers Union and Prospect unions without adding that neither union had agreed to the terms and that both were violently opposed to them. ■

FISHERIES

More powers for Navy

THE ROYAL NAVY is preparing to protect Britain's fishing waters in the event of a no-deal Brexit by deploying four patrol ships, according to news reports.

The armed vessels are to be primed from 1 January to deter EU fishing boats from illegally entering British waters. The ships will be prepared to stop and even impound EU vessels if there is no breakthrough in the Brexit talks.

Ministers are also preparing legislation to authorise the Royal Navy Police to board foreign vessels and arrest fishermen if required.

Admiral Lord West, a former chief of naval staff, said the Royal Navy should protect UK waters from foreign fishing vessels if asked to do so in a no-deal Brexit scenario. Speaking to BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme, Lord West said: "It is absolutely appropriate that the Royal Navy should protect our waters if the position is that we are a sovereign state and our government has said we don't want other nations there." ■

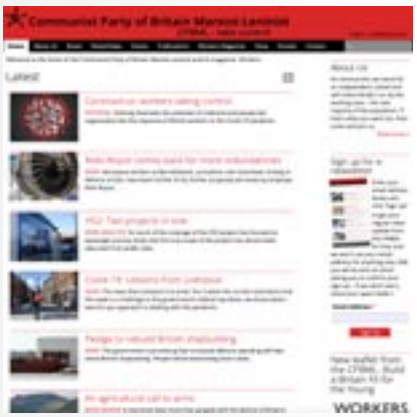
AFGHANISTAN

Civilian deaths soar

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump's rundown of ground forces in Afghanistan was accompanied by an escalation in the air war – resulting in hundreds of civilian deaths, according to a study by the Costs of War Institute at Brown University, Rhode Island.

From 2017 to 2019 the number of Afghan civilians killed in airstrikes rose by 330 per cent, says the study, more than in any other year since the start of the current conflict in 2001 and 2002. ■

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…

HS2: Two projects in one

So much of the coverage of the HS2 project has focused on passenger journey times that the true scope of the project has almost been obscured from public view.

Rolls-Royce comes back for more redundancies.

Striking aerospace workers at Barnoldswick, Lancashire, were further hit by more proposed job losses.

Covid-19: Lessons from Liverpool

The news that Liverpool was to enter Tier 2 when the current restrictions ended was a challenge to the government's default top-down, we-know-what's-best-for-you approach to dealing with the pandemic.

An agricultural call to arms

A new book does more than grapple with the decline of Britain's farming – it sets out what needs to be done.

Sinn Fein and DUP unite over EU food threat

A row over the flow of food trade between the British mainland and Northern Ireland has led the leaders of Sinn Fein and the DUP to tell the EU it would be unacceptable to disrupt food supply in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

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.

Rodhullandemu (CC BY-SA 4.0)

RRS *Sir David Attenborough* shortly after launch in 2018 at the Cammell Laird shipyard, Birkenhead.

Boost for shipbuilding

THE GOVERNMENT announced an increase in defence spending in the House of Commons on 19 November, part of the first conclusions of its Integrated Review covering security, defence, development and foreign policy.

Noteworthy is the statement of intent to restore Britain's shipbuilding industry. Plenty of the people who put Boris Johnson into office will be watching and demanding implementation of this pledge.

The extra spending will allow the government to take forward plans for 13 new frigates, as well as support ships for carriers. Johnson said it would "spur a renaissance of British shipbuilding across the UK – in Glasgow and Rosyth, Belfast, Appledore and Birkenhead – guaranteeing jobs and illuminating the benefits of the Union in the white light of the arc welder's torch."

It's up to workers to hold him to his promises. Harland and Wolff, for example, which now owns Appledore, is in turn owned by asset management company Infrastrata. Two years ago, Infrastrata made a deal with Spanish shipbuilding giant Navantia to team up on a range of products. These included supporting Navantia in its bid for new support ships for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Significantly, there is no mention anywhere of the Withdrawal Agreement – which seeks to bind Britain to EU rules on procurement, covering all public contracts, utilities, and defence and security. These rules would hamstring the government's ability to give the work to British suppliers. ■

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

COVID-19
Normal service

HARDLY ANY libraries in the whole of Britain's higher education system maintained their usual services through the fraught 2020 autumn term. One which did was the library of the University College of Osteopathy.

Public Health England specifically approved the UCO's detailed and well-supported safety procedures – the systematic provision of the recommended measures of hand-sanitising, mask-wearing, and social distancing. These succeeded in keeping students and staff safe, while the library continued to provide face-to-face services as well as its regular online and email services. It was also open as usual for the five weekday late shifts and for all the UCO's teaching weekends.

This was despite the overly cautious advice of the librarians' professional body, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, of the education and public service trade unions, the NEU, UCU and Unison, of local authorities, and of the government.

Even in the NHS, across the country, many health libraries closed their doors, did not provide direct access to stock, and reduced their usual services. But some saw clearly that their services had a part to play in the fight against Covid-19, and maintained physical services as well as online ones, with all the necessary safety measures in place.

According to research published in the journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* (bit.ly/3oMXvkl), workers in education are more likely to get severe disease than non-essential workers. But the risk to health workers is much higher – 7.5 times the risk to non-essential workers as opposed to less than double for education workers. ■

BREXIT

The chips are down

BRITAIN IS not the only country whose agriculture has been distorted by the EU (see page 15). One country which will pay the price is Ireland.

The country has an appetite for chips second only to Britain. Yet after 1 January, Irish fish fryers and food manufacturers face a shortage of potatoes with the right sugar balance for making chips. The Irish Department of Agriculture has warned that all British potatoes, including seed plants, will be banned from importation once transition arrangements end on 1 January 2021, whether or not there is a trade deal.

Ireland grows around 10,000 tonnes of chipping potatoes a year, but imports 80,000 tonnes from Britain. ■

Dave Souza (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Ferguson Marine Engineering fabrication yard, Port Glasgow.

SNP ferries fiasco

AGEING FERRY ships that have provided life-line services to dozens of islands around the coasts of Scotland should have been replaced in 2018, but now the wait for them has been extended until at least 2023. The cross-party Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee of the Scottish Parliament looking into the construction and procurement of ferries in Scotland published its report in early December. An angry response has followed from the Rail Maritime and Transport union (RMT) which represents the ferry workers, organising over 1,000 seafarers and shore side staff, mainly across the Clyde and Hebrides, Northern Isles and Orkney Ferries contracts.

The costs of the new ships have risen dramatically by three times the original estimates to over £300 million, with a delay in construction of over five years. The report criticises "the lack of robust due diligence" shown by the Scottish government-owned company, Caledonian Asset Management, which owns and procures ferries for CalMac.

It also condemns the "complete lack of transparency" on loans of £45 million made to the winner of the original £97 million contract, Ferguson Marine Engineering. The management of the process was a "catastrophic failure" according to the report.

Local businesses were left out of pocket when the company and its Ferguson Shipyard in Port Glasgow collapsed, with £49.8 million owed to the Scottish taxpayer. Jim McColl's Clyde Blowers Capital, the former owner, and another secured creditor were owed £3 million. McColl had already rescued what was renowned as the last privately owned shipyard on the Clyde – and great plans were in hand to expand and preserve its operations.

The debacle forced the yard into administration, setting off a bitter row between the businessman and the SNP leadership. The collapse does not bode well for the British government's recently announced 30-year vision for shipbuilding – a bold plan that cannot flourish on naval defence contracts alone.

Mick Cash, RMT General Secretary, commented: "This saga reinforces RMT's position that vessel procurement and design will only succeed under full public ownership of Scotland's public ferry contracts." Taken together with the recent collapse of the Burntisland Fabrication offshore wind farm project, losing the taxpayer over £50 million, the SNP administration's industrial record is in tatters. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming…later

CPBML public meetings are not currently taking place. Normal service will be resumed as soon as possible. To keep up-to-date as things change, make sure you're signed up to receive our electronic newsletter (see the foot of the left-hand column, page 4).

JANUARY

Wednesday 13 January, 7pm

CPBML discussion meeting (via Zoom): "After Brexit: the fight for a future"

What practical steps can we make to start exerting control over the direction of the country? If you're interested in attending, email info@cpbml.org.uk.

ELECTRIC CARS

Cornish promise

IN A BIG boost for electric vehicle battery production in Britain, mining exploration company Cornish Lithium announced significant investment in December towards building a production facility in Cornwall. The news comes after the company's announcement in September of the discovery of "globally significant" lithium levels in brine from hot springs near Redruth.

Lithium is essential for the current generation of electric car batteries, with car manufacturers investing in production facilities for millions of new vehicles. Lithium production at present is centred in Chile, Australia, China and Argentina – there is only one commercial lithium producer in the US, for example.

The Cornish brine could turn out to be relatively cheap to extract, as it contains exceptionally low levels of magnesium and sodium, chemicals which make it much harder and costlier to separate the lithium compounds. In addition, power sources are easily available unlike, for example, in Chile's Atacama Desert.

While there is still some way to go before a production facility is set up in Cornwall – bringing a whole new industry to the region – Cornish Lithium's recent multi-million pound purchase of a licence from Australian company Lepidico for what it describes as an environmentally responsible processing technique, is a positive step forward. ■

One battle ends, but
the EU comes a new

The figh

FREE AT LAST. But how to use that freedom? That is the question facing the British working class. And the answer can only come from workers, united as a class.

For or against Brexit? That doesn't matter any more. What does matter is how we face the future.

British independence from the EU comes at a time when the independence of all countries is under attack. The world is full of think tanks and well-paid politicians telling us sovereignty is a thing of the past.

What does it even mean, they ask? But look around you, and it is crystal clear why workers – in all countries – need national sovereignty and independence to exercise the control they need to live decent lives and plan for a decent future.

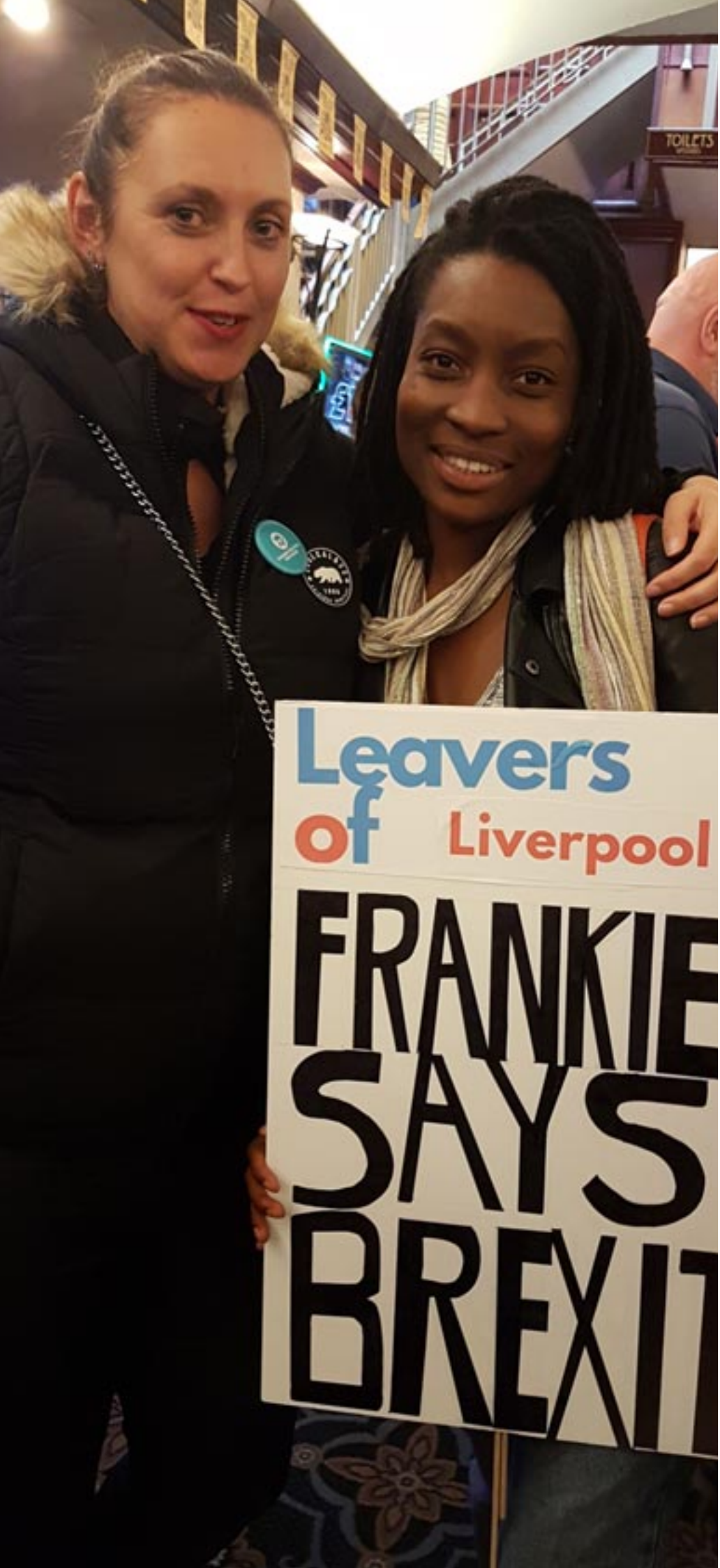
Corporations

Ranged against the workers of the world are the global corporations and banks, whose power and reach has never been greater. Walmart, the world's biggest supermarket company, has annual sales of around $520 billion – about the same as Poland's annual GDP. If it were a country, Walmart would be in the world's top 25 for GDP. Saudi Aramco, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft are each valued at over $1 trillion.

These companies have only one interest: to sell whatever they want, at whatever prices they wish, in every country. Literally. That's what they mean by a "free trade agreement" – freedom for them.

Take Walmart's submission to the US government in 2013 about the Trade in Services Agreement then being negotiated with the EU. It pushed for the agreement to specify "no restrictions on store size, number, or geographic location" and "no merchandize restrictions", including the right to sell tobacco and pharmaceuticals.

And then there's health. Globally, by far the biggest market sector is that for healthcare, estimated at around $12 trillion a year. It dwarfs other sectors – vehicle manufacture, sales and parts together account



Liverpool leavers at a rally in Manchester, October 2019. The bedrock of support for British independence has continued since the June 2016 referendum.

Workers

t the war goes on. With the end of British involvement in w beginning – the fight for real independence…

t for a future

for around $8 trillion, for example. But sadly for the corporations, most of the world's healthcare is run by governments. The corporations want that to change, to turn health from a service into a profit centre.

Four of the world's 25 biggest companies (by revenue) are in healthcare, all based in the US. No wonder there's plenty of lobbying money behind the concept of the single European health market. The EU has just taken a huge stride towards that, using the lever of public health to increase health funding in the next budget period from €1.7 billion to €5.1 billion and grab areas of competence from member states.

Thankfully, Britain is out of that particular mess. But that won't stop the corporations and their globalist allies – in all the parliamentary parties – from seeking trade agreements which enable the US to exert maximum pressure to open up all markets to their goods and services.

Whatever the problems and risks that nation states run, they are now the only bulwark against the global corporations. Those who argue against independence and sovereignty for nation states are actually arguing for all independence and sovereignty to be put in the hands of globalised capital.

For workers in Britain, a key task now is to ensure that freedom from the EU is used to prevent enslavement to the corporations through free trade agreements.

Some say that profitable corporations make for a rich society. The facts say otherwise. All over the world the super-rich are appropriating a rising share of income and wealth. The rise in company profits over the past decades has been achieved by a reduction in the proportion of revenue paid out in wages – a process well documented in the US.

'The unavoidable conclusion is that workers must wrest power for themselves…'

In July last year two economists working for the US Federal Reserve Board published a devastating paper entitled *Market Power, Inequality, and Financial Instability*. In dry, analytical language they show how "real wage growth has stagnated behind productivity growth over the last four decades and, as a result, the labor income share has declined".

Profit and wages

They go on to highlight the correlation over the period since 1980 to 2018 between rising profits and the decreasing share returned as wages. "This correlation suggests that the rise of the profit share and the fall of the labor share may have been driven by a common cause," they say.

That's capitalism for you. ow have the corporations managed to depress the share of wages? The Federal Reserve paper points to the size of the US monopolies: big enough to set the wages they want. On this side of the Atlantic, at least, there is another factor at work: the huge increase in the available supply of labour through encouraging mass migration from lower-income countries to richer ones.

In this capitalism has been aided by the EU's principle of free movement of labour – one that has seen poorer countries such as Romania stripped of their skilled medical personnel. And then there is the World Trade Organization, whose General Agreement on Trade in Services has a little-known section called Mode 4 to facilitate the flow of skilled labour across borders.

So here's another task for workers in Britain: to ensure that liberation from the EU's free movement does not turn into reliance on importing labour from outside the EU. True internationalism is about maintaining skill and living standards through training and employment here, not the new colonialism that devastates the supply of skilled workers abroad in countries that desperately need them.

To say that's not going to be easy would be an understatement. The government (like, it must be said, many governments before it) has shown no sign of limiting non-EU migration. Quite the reverse.

In this the government is backed by the full weight of the establishment, including the Labour Party. And aided by so-called leftists who try to shut down any debate about migration or sovereignty as "fascist" – a phenomenon dealt with by Brexiteer and former (presently disbarred) Fire Brigades Union executive member Paul Embery in his new book *Despised: Why the Modern Left Loathes the Working Class*.

Here, then, is the crucial challenge facing the working class: How to take the control repatriated to Britain and wield it in the interests of the people of Britain. The unavoidable conclusion for workers is that they must wrest control for themselves. We are so close to the levers of power already that we could reach out and grab them – if we choose to organise to do so.

People talk about the government running the country, but in truth most of the time it is workers who run the country. It is workers who run the NHS, day in and day out. Workers who keep the power lines humming. Workers who drive the buses, the trains and the vans and trucks.

Will

As outlined in the editorial in this issue (see page 2), there's ample evidence from the response to the Covid-19 pandemic that workers are utterly capable of organising society themselves. All that is lacking is the will to do so – and that will should have been strengthened by experience during the pandemic.

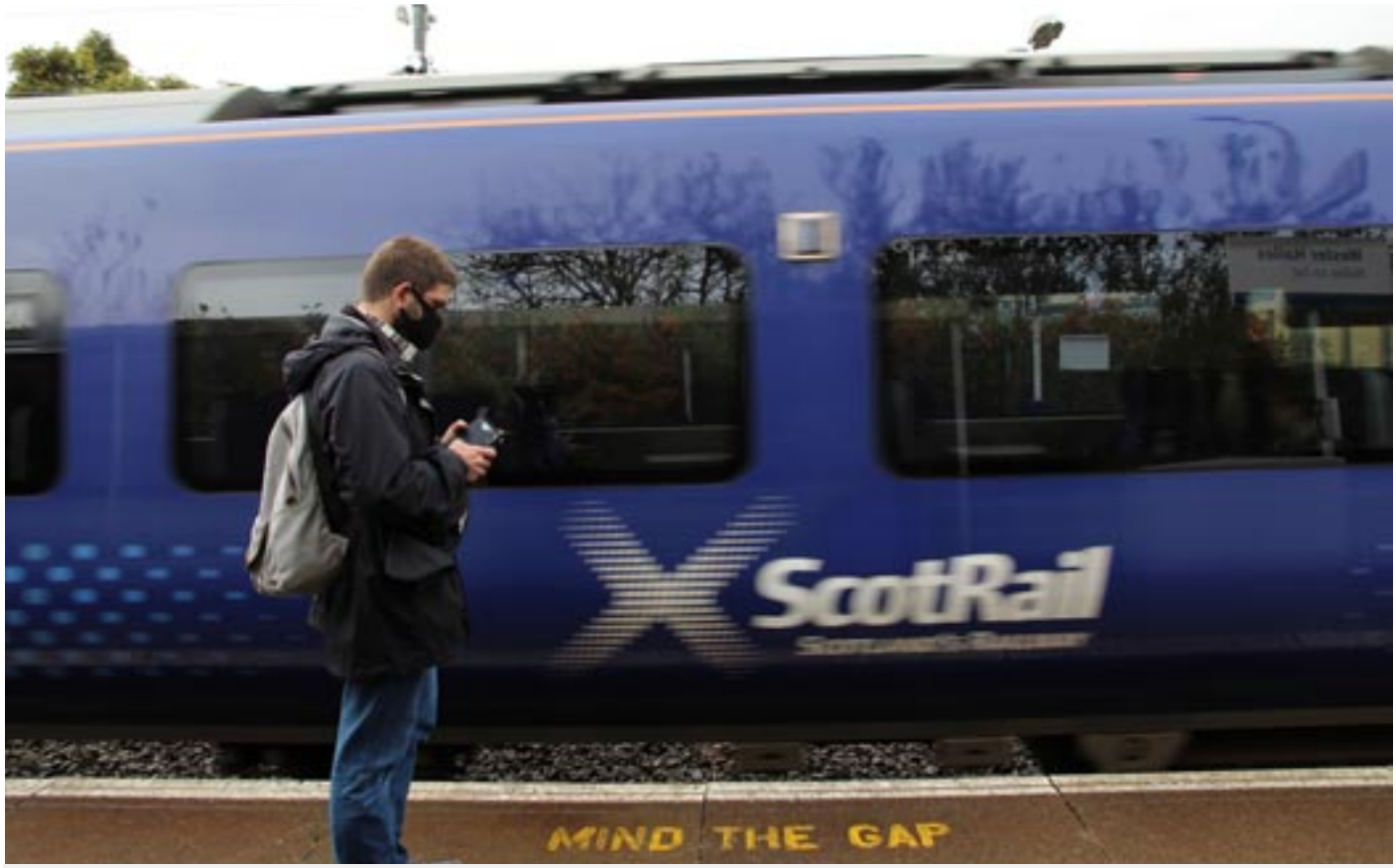
Workers can no longer dodge the issue of power. Each small step in exercising control, from the plans put forward by the industrial unions for manufacturing and employment to the demands of Britain's fishermen, must be celebrated and used to encourage others. From small movements larger ones will grow.

Certainly, any idea that the Labour Party will represent workers is dying a long-overdue death. But it is not enough to bid farewell to the Labour Party. Along with abandoning the decades-long compulsion to support Labour must come the realisation that the whole ideology of social democracy must be junked.

Only the working class can save itself, and to do so it has to embrace British independence – and save the nation. ■

For Britain to persist with devolved health services is a no
the current health crisis efforts are being dissipated. A loc

Devolving health: it does



Serge Cornu/shutterstock.com

The biggest gap in Scotland is between the SNP's pronouncements of success against Covid-19 and the reality of failure.

THE SEPARATE policies on the Covid-19 pandemic being pursued by the administrations in Scotland and Wales have not resulted in any better results. Far from it: a report published by the Institute of Government at the end of October, *Co-ordination and Divergence: devolution and coronavirus*, points out the dangers of devolution exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

After several months, more vigorous lockdowns are now deemed to be necessary in Wales. In Scotland there were 5,634 deaths related to the pandemic as of 29 November, comparing unfavourably to Denmark, Finland, Norway and Slovakia, with similar population sizes, which had around a few hundred. Norway, with the same population count as Scotland, had around 300 by mid November.

Devolution has granted the Scottish National Party full control over healthcare. With a compliant print media, a devolved BBC news outlet that features Nicola Sturgeon nightly, and a tame STV which benefits from lucrative Scottish government advertising revenue, a mythology developed through 2020 that Sturgeon and her administration were handling the pandemic particularly well. We now see that this perception is not sustainable.

Petty

A growing tendency over the months of the pandemic has been the instigation of petty differences between Scotland's approach and that of the British government in the application of lockdowns and regulations.

Sometimes it was a pre-empting of the UK announcements, sometimes a harsher version, sometimes appearing to be more lenient. Where Boris Johnson had three tiers, Sturgeon had to have five. If powers to run healthcare are apportioned, then blame can be apportioned too.

One mistake that can clearly be attributed is that, early in the pandemic, the Scottish administration decided to discharge elderly hospital patients with serious ailments back to their care homes. During March and April 2020, 3599 were discharged. Many had become infected with Covid-19.

Doctors and other health professionals were not making frequent visits to care homes. "Do not resuscitate" orders began to be used. And carers were not being tested early in the pandemic. In April, for example, over 100 healthcare professionals expressed grave concern about the inadequacy of the personal protective equipment (PPE) issued to them.

A report from the Unite trade union demanded an end to hospitals having to re-use PPE. On 10 May 2020, the

nsense – economies of scale are being lost and during ok at Scotland indicates the scale of the problem…

sn't make sense

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control showed that there had been 1,438 deaths involving Covid-19 in Scottish care homes. This figure represented 45 per cent of all deaths, whereas the comparative numbers for England and Wales were 21 per cent and 25 per cent respectively.

Figures in November 2020 showed that, in Scotland, 2,101 people died in care homes and 2,419 in hospitals in cases involving Covid-19. The Care Inspectorate registered 30 red warnings that care homes did not have sufficient staff to cope with residents during the lockdowns. 149 amber warnings were also received about staff numbers approaching a dangerously low level.

Culpability goes back many years, not just to the start of the pandemic. Deficiencies flagged up in the social care sector in 2015 (in the Scottish pandemic alertness exercise "Silver Swan") were largely ignored. And in January 2020, before Covid-19 cases were noted, senior health professionals expressed concerns about the lack of PPE stocks in Scotland.

Despite invitations, Sturgeon did not take part in several British government Cobra meetings to organise policy towards the pandemic. She attended in March – but it did not take long for policies to begin diverging.

The leading Scottish microbiologist Professor Hugh Pennington, emeritus professor of bacteriology at Aberdeen University, has been warning about the poor SNP record on health policy since the 2014 referendum. He remarked, "We had the test but we did not use all the facilities that were available." Despite pinpointing the greater risks threatening care homes, he was ignored by SNP ministers.

Wishful thinking

Then in July we saw more "holier-than-thou" attitudes. Sturgeon tried to justify not ruling out quarantining visitors from England, by alleging that Covid-19 prevalence in Scotland was five times lower than in England. This claim was quickly debunked by the UK chief statistician, who accused her of using unpublished and incomplete data.

Scottish Justice Secretary Humza Yousaf claimed in the summer that about 20 per cent of travellers arriving in Scotland had been contacted to check for development of Covid-19 symptoms. He later had to correct his error when it became apparent that not one check had taken place. Then, for the week ending 26 July, the Scottish administration claimed there had been zero deaths from Covid-19. Yet the National Records of Scotland (NRS) reported eight.

Even after the different methodologies were explained, it was the fantasy "zero" sum that grabbed the headlines around Britain. Public Health England (PHE) counts all who have ever been diagnosed with Covid-19, even if they recovered quickly but later died of a different cause.

Sturgeon's estimates exclude anyone who dies more than 28 days after a positive Covid-19 test. Yet during the grilling she got in the Andrew Marr BBC interview on 29 November, statistics (from ONS/NRS) were given showing Covid-19 deaths per million in Scotland consistently exceeding those in England during November.

Nor is the Scottish administration's record on general health a good one. Taking Scotland on its own, when deaths from all causes are included in 2020 up to the end of May, it comes out as second worst in Europe for deaths among the under 65s. Hardly any progress was made in urban areas of multiple deprivation – such as in east Glasgow – in terms of very low life expectancy.

The remarks in parliament outlining how £8.2 billion has been provided by the UK Treasury to aid Scotland (Jacob Rees-Mogg, 10 December 2020) bring home the strength of a united Britain. The fairytale finances of a break-away Scotland – or a break-away Scottish health service – are now exposed. As the anti-separatist blogger Effie Deans remarked in December:

"It is unseemly for Kate Forbes [Cabinet Secretary for Finance] and Fiona Hyslop [Cabinet Secretary for Economy] to send begging tweets asking the Chancellor to confirm that he will continue to fund Scots staying at home for as long as we feel unsafe to venture out, while at the same time campaigning for independence. Scotland may have an independent health policy, but it still overwhelmingly depends on advice and expertise from London and it is sustainable only because London pays the bill."

'Culpability goes back many years, not just to the start of the pandemic…'

Again, the problems go back a long way. Referring to a report from the financial watchdog Audit Scotland whose October 2019 analysis showed the devolved NHS in Scotland struggling to be financially sustainable, Monica Lennon, Scottish Labour's health spokeswoman remarked:

"Health and social care services are on the brink of financial disaster and Nicola Sturgeon is cementing her legacy as the First Minister who failed the NHS. Instead of transforming health and social care to meet the complex needs of our ageing population, services face a £1.8 billion black hole and that's down to SNP mismanagement for the past 12 years."

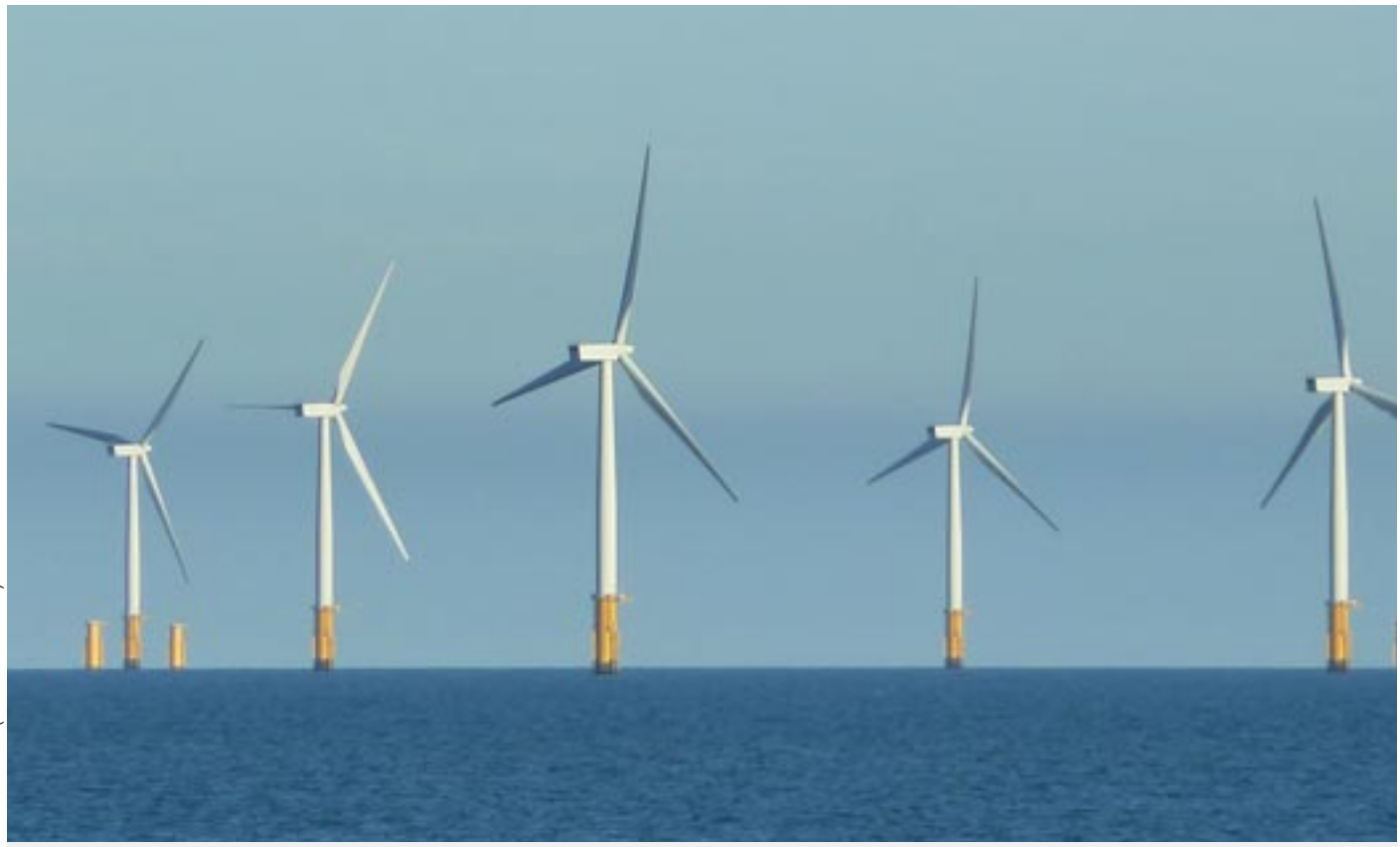
Of course, before becoming SNP leader Sturgeon served as Scotland's Health Secretary from 2007 to 2012 under the leadership of Alex Salmond. The BMA Scotland chairman Dr Lewis Morrison added that these findings "overall paint a stark picture of the parlous state of our NHS".

The shadow looming over all of these shortcomings is that the SNP administration has a bleak vision of breaking up the NHS. For the separatists, the "national" in the title refers to Scotland not Britain. They ignore the economies of scale and the interconnectedness of such a nationwide service.

For the founders and custodians of the NHS the vision was of an institution that would be available, free at the point of contact, for every Briton. We are now the custodians and we must keep it that way – prevent the weakening, the devolving, the danger of break-up. An independent health service for an independent Britain. ■

The government's latest announcement on energy policy i government procurement to boost jobs and investment he

New money for energy, r



Rob Farrow (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Wind turbines in the North Sea off Skegness.

AT LAST THE government is putting real money and real commitment behind a practical programme for Britain's energy future. The programme includes support for infrastructure that will help build the country's wind power generation.

The aim is to have 60 per cent of the country's power supplied from offshore wind turbines. It's an ambitious project, but wind alone will never be enough.

Britain already has the world's largest wind farm, Hornsea One, off the coast of Yorkshire, and an even larger wind farm is planned for Hornsea Two. But if the wind drops on a cold winter's day (or worse, winter's evening), there has to be some other backup.

'The big question with wind power is who benefits…'

As if to underline this, the National Grid tweeted a warning on 14 October last year. "Unusually low wind output coinciding with a number of generator outages means the cushion of spare capacity we operate the system with has been reduced," the operator said.

Employment

In an encouraging sign, the government announced support for a major push on Small Modular Nuclear Reactors (see Box), which could bring huge energy benefits to Britain as well as boost employment and export possibilities. Meanwhile, the big question with wind power is who benefits.

There was an intriguing sentence in the government's announcement: "Together with planned stringent requirements on supporting UK manufacturers in government-backed renewables projects, these measures will mean the industry can reach its target of 60% of offshore wind farm content coming from the UK."

This policy – if implemented – would probably do more for Britain's energy industry, and in particular for employment, than the £160 million pledged for infrastructure. Given that the government is talking about another 60,000 jobs being created directly and indirectly, this can only come about if more of the equipment is manufactured here. Much more.

And that can only happen when Britain is free of EU restrictions on procurement and government support. So a lot of people will be looking at the fine print of any agreement on so-called "level playing fields" with the EU, now or in the future.

But beneath the PR push of the announcement on energy support, there is still a long way to go. It raises the target for the proportion of British content in wind farms in the seas around the country from

s full of positive signs, with a welcome wish to use ere. But workers will want more than promises…

new commitment

the 50 per cent announced in March to 60 per cent – a figure rightly described by offshore trade union RMT as "meagre".

"The commitment for 60 per cent of the turbines to be manufactured in the UK only highlights that much more could have been done to invest in this sector and the jobs boost that would have been created. This was highlighted by the closure of Vestas on the Isle of Wight a decade ago," said Unite assistant general secretary Gail Cartmail.

And that content is measured over the "lifetime" of a wind farm, generally considered to be 30 years. It may well be that initial British content is well below 60 per cent, with the rest to be taken on trust over three decades.

Gap

There's a history of great government announcements followed by dismal results, not helped at all by the division of responsibilities that comes with devolution. In a graphic illustration of the gap between pronouncements and reality, a £2 billion deal for Burntisland Fabrications (BiFab) in Fife to build the metal jackets for turbines for the new EDF Neart Na Gaoithe (NnG) wind farm collapsed in October this year.

"Both the First Minister and the Prime Minister promised a green jobs revolution but they didn't tell anyone it would be exported, and it all amounts to broken promises to workers who needed these yards to be thriving instead of dying," said the unions Unite and the GMB in a joint statement.

"The fabrication contracts for NnG, just like those on the Seagreen project, will be manufactured by the rest of the world. Two projects worth a total of £5 billion, requiring 168 turbine jackets to power our future, and not even one will be built in Scotland, everyone needs to let that sink in."

Unions

Workers will also need to be active to ensure that additional work is available for them, and at reasonable rates. After years of campaigning, the RMT and Nautilus unions forced the government to amend the law so that as from 1 October 2020 maritime workers employed in UK waters must be paid the minimum wage.

In principle, this should lead to more jobs for British seafarers supplying and working in the new wind installations. But the unions are still waiting for the government to make it clear what action it will take to enforce this.

Recent experience with, for example, the textiles industry shows that without enforcement many employers will simply ignore the law, especially with so many sub-contractors about.

And on top of this, the Home Office is still giving visas allowing nationals from outside the European Economic Area to work on ships supplying offshore installations, even though with proper training schemes Britain could easily supply the labour required. ■

Small reactor revolution

IT IS NOT easy to take control of your future when your energy supply is uncertain as it is in Britain. Demands can be made to rebuild industry and to be more self-sufficient in production but none of that is achievable without a steady energy supply.

Currently Britain generates about 20 per cent of its electricity from nuclear – yet almost half of current capacity is to be retired by 2025, in four years' time. Belatedly, the government produced a policy paper on advanced nuclear technologies last November which at least shows some potential for how that gap is going to be rectified without relying on energy produced by other countries.

The term advanced nuclear technologies (otherwise known as small nuclear or small reactor technologies) encompasses a wide range of nuclear reactor technologies under development. The technologies share common attributes such as being smaller than conventional nuclear power station reactors and designed so that much of the plant can be fabricated in a factory environment and transported to site, reducing construction risk and making them less capital-intensive.

The policy paper was accompanied by the announcement of the Advanced Nuclear Fund, which includes funding of up to £215 million for small modular reactors (SMRs) and up to £170 million for advanced modular reactors (AMRs).

Each small modular reactor could produce 440 megawatts of electricity, enough to power a city roughly the size of Sheffield. As well as providing energy, these reactors could produce much-needed employment.

It's no pipe dream, either. The technology has been operating for decades… in nuclear submarines.

A consortium led by Rolls-Royce has pledged to create 6,000 jobs across Britain over the next five years with a plan to build a fleet of 16 small nuclear power stations. One of the first sites could be the former Trawsfynydd nuclear power station in Gwynedd in Wales.

Meanwhile, 80 per cent of the components could be made in factories in the Midlands and the North of England. It is envisaged that a further 34,000 skilled jobs could be created by 2040. These roles would be in manufacturing, assembly, the supply chain and the energy sector. It would be a genuinely "make it in Britain" project – unlike the recent history of the nuclear industry in Britain, which has been about relying on Chinese or French firms.

The consortium says that the first small reactor will take 10 years to get up and running, a timescale that leaves the country with a gap of several years as electricity from existing nuclear stations will dip. But once the infrastructure to produce the first small reactor is in place the consortium is hopeful that it will be able to build and install two a year.

Britain will need a technologically adroit, highly skilled workforce to make this a reality. Schools, institutions of education and employers also have a part to play in the future of energy. ■

While a significant minority in the cultural industries cried coronavirus succeeded in uniting the country around a ca

The arts in a time of co

LITTLE COULD anyone guess, as a new era of freedom from EU control dawned, that a deadly microscopic "critter" was about to give a mighty boost to independence. When Covid-19 struck, the creative sector had a choice. It could either wallow in lamentations – or adapt. It chose to adapt.

Needless worries over visas and cultural exchanges were put aside. Celebrities who had shown contempt for those they considered less sophisticated, less well-travelled, and less cosmopolitan than themselves now united to preserve, for a post-Covid (and post-colonial) world, British theatre, music, museums and heritage.

Despite the brutal suddenness of the pandemic, artists rose swiftly to the challenge. As Beth Bate, director of Dundee Contemporary Arts, said, when considering how to promote cultural value with Dundee Council, "We will come up with imaginative solutions. If we in the arts are not going to, who is?"

Covid has been a seismic shock to the arts because without reliable subsidy the financial foundations are perennially shaky. Workshops and studios carry high fixed costs. Arts Council and Lottery funding is never enough for the many freelancers and voluntary bodies that depend on it. Victorian theatres with their crumbling plaster ceilings are expensive to maintain and in London's West End rely on international traffic, which ceased overnight in March.

The government's arts recovery package was a loan, not a grant. It was aimed at saving institutions, not jobs and skills. With limited trade union control, redundancies were inevitable, and they hit architects, surveyors and engineers as well as performers. The careers of many newly qualified young people ended before they began.

'The sheer human will to survive was boosted by proactive grassroots organisation…'

But the sheer human will to survive was boosted by proactive grassroots organisation. A colossal organised industry exists behind the scenes, drawing on an extensive reservoir of skills, unseen by the general public. It was up to the workers themselves – the stage managers, the riggers, carpenters and electricians, the actors and opera singers, the directors and conductors – to develop a strategy to preserve their skills and inspire audiences to return.

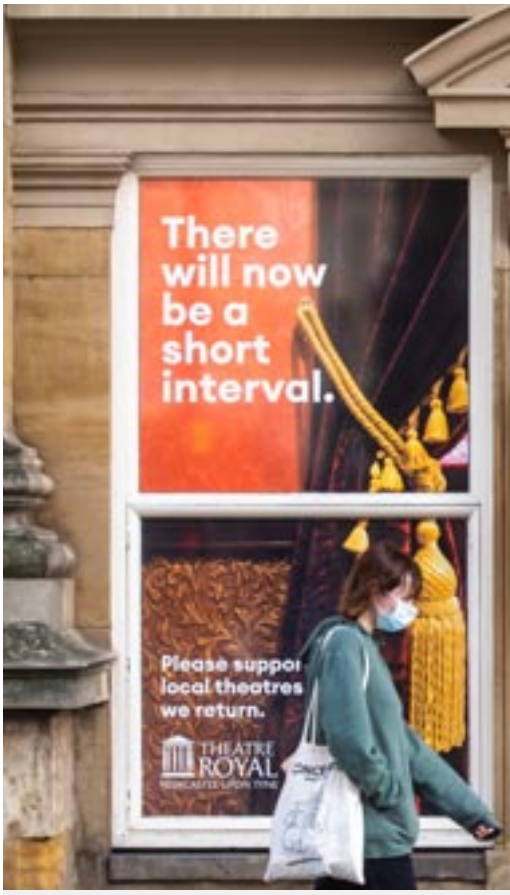
Safety

They took Herculean steps to make workplaces and venues safe. They planned socially distanced live performances and festivals, with the audience seated in household bubbles. They mounted "Drive and Live" opera in parks and car parks. When government guidance changed abruptly, they streamed pre-recorded performances. One innovation on Zoom was Interactive Shakespeare, where the audience participated alongside the cast.

New forms of cooperation sprang up. Publishers relaxed restrictions on digital distribution of copyright works to facilitate impromptu performance and live-streaming. Through a series of online events, stage managers shared their expertise in reconfiguring space, and this was taken up by schools.

Old theatres with their warrens of cramped corridors and dressing rooms found it more difficult to follow their own advice. Yet by November, as the uniquely British panto season drew near, live entertainment venues were reporting that they had no known cases of Covid.

Having strained every sinew to keep staff and audiences safe, theatres such as Newcastle, Salford and Birmingham naturally questioned the need to close when their towns were put into Tier 3 restrictions. They compared their efforts to Sisyphus, condemned forever to push a boulder uphill. In December the National Theatre launched its own streaming service, drawing on a library of past productions and providing a platform for future performances. School bookings began to roll in.



JordanCrosby/shutterstock.com

Newcastle Theatre Royal closed under Tier 3 rest

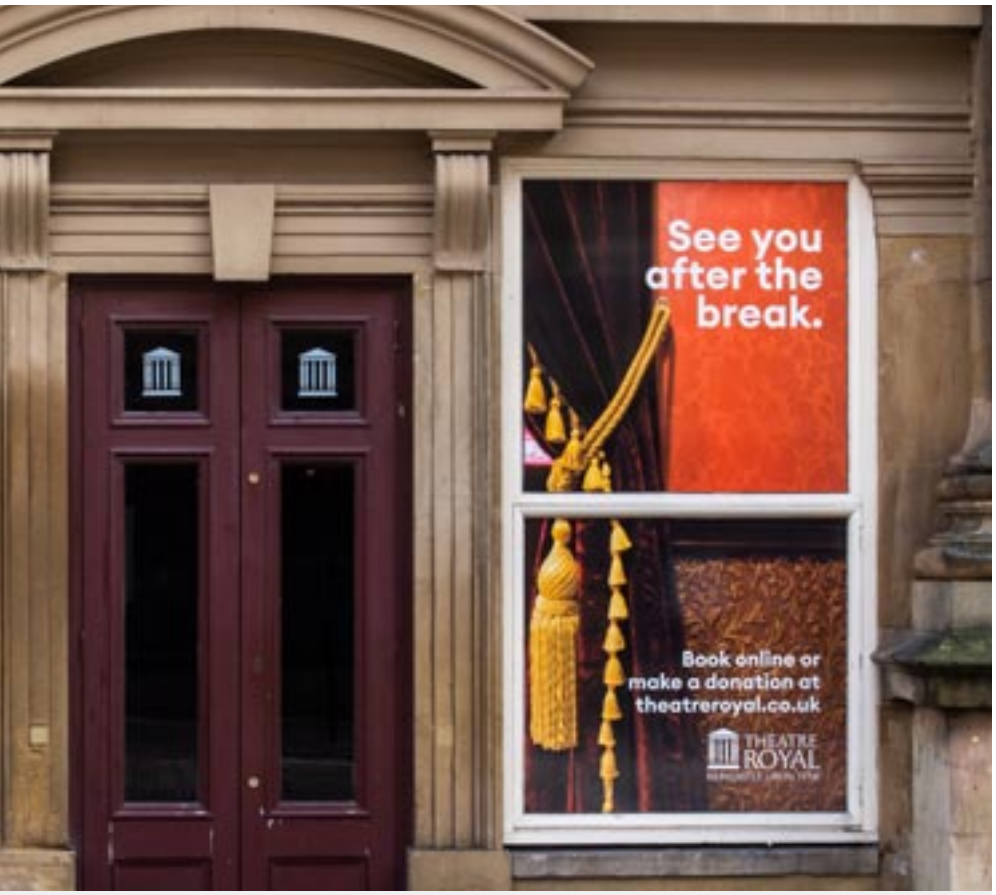
Subscriptions at a fraction of the cost of live theatre tickets are intended to help support the freelancers on whom the shows depend. Token subscriptions have enabled small venues to keep going despite exorbitant rents. Big events, such as the annual Cirque du Soleil, were helped through public donations via YouTube.

As part of its forthcoming Culture in Quarantine initiative, the BBC will feature 15 newly recorded plays on TV and radio, also on iPlayer. More than 12 theatres and producers across Britain will participate in a three-week season that will include a mix of premieres and shows being filmed for television for the first time.

In response to the rise of online performance, actors' union Equity announced plans to draw up a streaming media agreement because so many members are working without contracts. The producers argue that the union "has no jurisdiction

(literally) over their imagined loss through Brexit, use all corners of Britain could agree on: survival…

ronavirus



trictions, October 2020.

over cyberspace" and that actors participate "from the safety and comfort of their own home". This will chime with what workers in other industries have been hearing from employers taking advantage of the government's instruction to work from home.

As with theatre, the need to stay connected with the public also motivated galleries and museums. They were already developing digital technology as an educational tool. Now they extended it to reach a wider audience in new and exciting ways.

Local

The National Gallery and the British Museum led the way with tours curated by specialists. No longer were they required to spend millions of pounds on internationally competitive blockbuster exhibitions. There could be a revived focus on the local, on forgotten British arts and crafts – ironically, a case of the tiny pathogen helping put Brexit into practice

In the world of design and heritage, those barred from their workplaces found innovative ways of expressing their working identity. Beautifully crafted face coverings, some with William Morris patterns, appeared for sale on social media. Mask technology was taken up by theatrical costume departments, for instance at the English National Opera, providing singers and instrumentalists with the means to resonate and breathe, without intake of fabric.

It may seem too obvious to mention, but the mental health of millions in isolation has depended on the arts via TV, radio, tablets and phones. The constant companionship of drama, literature, comedy and music, often taken for granted as background noise, cannot be underestimated in saving the nation's sanity.

Appreciation of the NHS in saving lives was incorporated into much of the activity. As the Cabinet, unaccustomed by virtue of its class to approach ordinary workers for help, dithered and faltered during the PPE shortage, costume professionals up and down Britain raised money and sewed scrubs to enable medics to carry on working. A hitherto unsuspected army of trained doctors emerged out of hiding from the thespian ranks to staff intensive care wards and A&E.

Circuses offered tents and equipment for field hospitals. Choirs sang and bands played. Museums donated money they scarcely could afford. Without missing a beat, the union for professional tourist guides created a market in virtually guided tours peering into the hidden corners of Britain, and made these tours free to the NHS. This genuine solidarity between groups of workers springs from a deeper historical place than the banging of pots and pans on a Thursday night.

Britain's success in administering the first set of vaccines, with a second, Oxford-based, vaccine due imminently, will stiffen the collective resolve of workers. But much work lies ahead. Britain's pioneering role in science and technology is today fundamental to the arts.

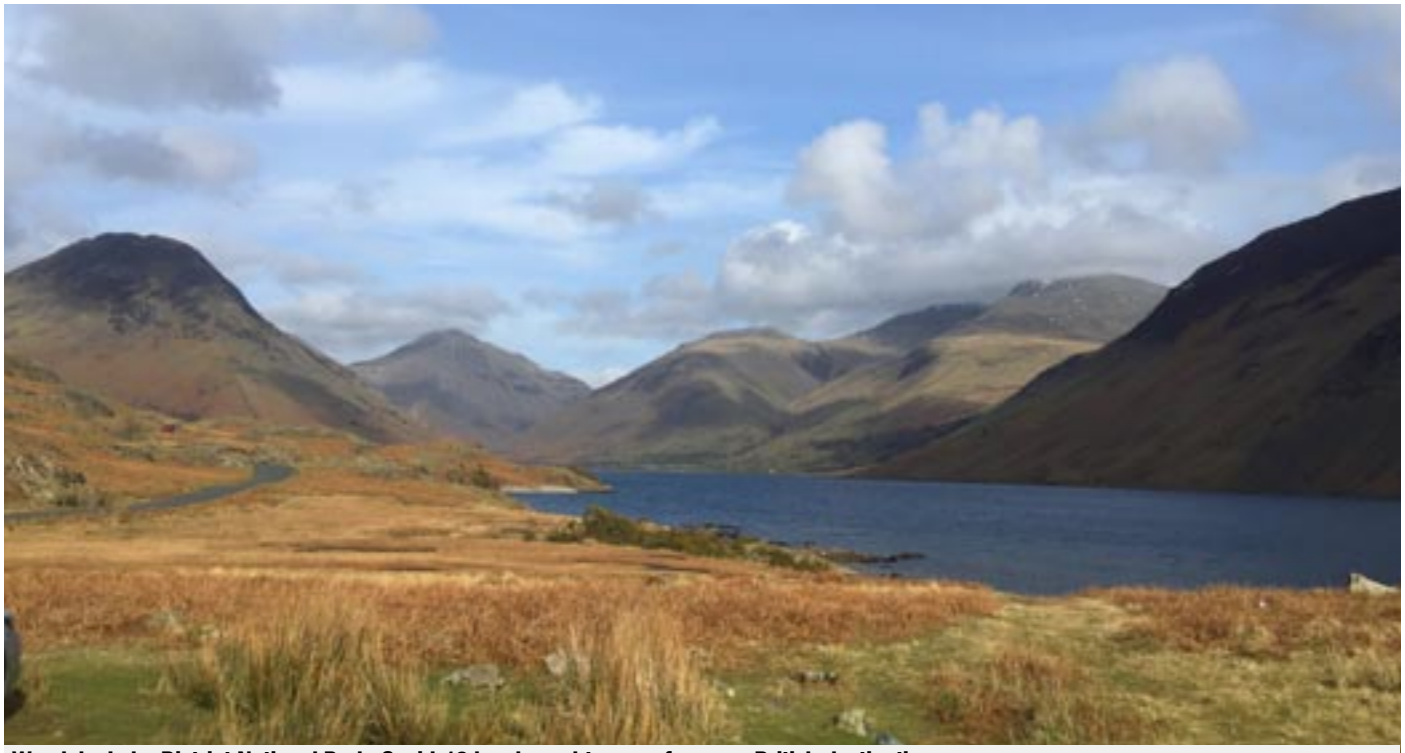
Digital technology is innovative and exciting, and should be developed to complement live performance. It is the perfect medium for gamers, whose creativity contributes so much to today's economy. For the foundations of the arts to be rebuilt stronger, the country must reconstruct its economic base by manufacturing the things future generations will demand.

That said, virtual experience is no substitute for living and breathing humanity. We have been solitary, largely passive, recipients of performance art, instead of that warm responsive audience performers need for spontaneity. When this crisis is over, people will clamour for a full return to theatres and galleries, to argument and lively tableside conversation.

Perhaps then, that conversation could include more than tacit acknowledgement by the cultural community of the good sense of the majority, who in 2016 created an escape hatch for the nation to realise its potential. ■

Visitors from abroad recognise Britain as one nation – something tour operators are well aware of…

A nation for tourism



Workers

Wasdale, Lake District National Park. Covid-19 has brought a new focus on British destinations.

ONE BRITISH EXPORT the EU could never quite control under its "distortion of competition" drive was inbound tourism. Britain is what it is: its history, its particular nature as an island, its scientific and cultural achievements, its bricks and mortar, cannot be altered or outsourced to suit Brussels or Rome. As with every other nation, people travel to experience what is special about a place. Only war or a pandemic can temporarily prevent that.

Even before Covid, visitors to these shores knew the British to be an independent minded and resilient people. Brexit has increased their curiosity, adding to a pent-up desire to come here once travel bans are lifted.

By "here" they acknowledge Britain as a whole. Scotland and Wales without borders are easily visited from England. Not for nothing is the parent tourism body known as Visit Britain. Regional offshoots exist by virtue of regional difference, not division.

Witness the pride of three small towns on the Scottish Borders which have just bought out land from the Dukes of Buccleuch. They don't need devolution to develop as a tourist destination. They have sworn to prosper through their own efforts.

Brexit was welcomed as an opportunity to re-focus on British destinations, a reason to reboot and re-energise. Not just the obvious iconic attractions, but the walks, the wildlife, the cuisine.

In economic terms, the loss to Britain from Covid was £64 million a day, according to Visit Britain). The airline and cruise industries simply collapsed. The tourism industry predicted a loss of 2.4 million jobs in the UK sector during 2020, more than half the 4 million jobs that comprise 11 per cent of the country's workforce.

New skills

Tourism organisations came together to provide direction and keep their members busy. It was a chance to learn new digital skills: for publicists to get savvy about Creative Commons, the type of copyright where authors allow others to use their images, for example on Flickr.

Britain's National Health Service became a unifying factor. Under the banner "Britain Unites", various travel industry professionals, both employers and the employed, came together to salute the NHS with free offers well into 2021.

UK Inbound, which represents 200 inbound tour operators, including the Scottish Tourism Alliance which overwhelmingly voted No to Scottish secession in 2014, launched its Tourism Resilience Fund for businesses wholly reliant on international visitors from key markets like the USA and China.

The Chancellor did not come to their aid, nor perhaps should he. Despite the economic hit, there are more pressing matters such as transport, housing, the environment, new schools. In addition, it has been noted during Covid that without the crowds, the streets and galleries are more enjoyable.

It may be that tourism has peaked never to recover to its former extent. It may be that virtual sightseeing will become a permanent feature of modern life, though not without its own digital carbon footprint.

United and free to make our own choices, it will be up to the British people to decide. ■

New developments in agricultural policy give some idea of our potential future as a sovereign nation…

Agriculture unchained

CHANGE IS on the way for agriculture. In November the government set out the future shape of farming subsidies in the "Path to Sustainable Farming". It marks a major change in approach.

The EU's subsidy system was based on land ownership. The more land you owned, the more you received in subsidies. Out of the EU, the new British system will instead be structured to reward "sustainable" farming practices, encouraging farmers to protect natural habitat and establish new woodlands.

One can argue about the detail of these measures, and the subsidy regime must provide better support for farmers to produce food, but in putting them forward the government has stolen a march on the EU.

Posing

Though Brussels likes to pose as the greenest of the green, member states have been bickering for decades about Common Agricultural Policy reform and failed to take any significant measures to make farming more sustainable. And still there is no agreement on reform.

A report commissioned by the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee of the European Parliament, also delivered in November, didn't mince its words. It said that the European Commission's latest (2018) proposal for "business as usual" CAP reform was only "marginally consistent" with the EU's declared environmental aims. "In the longer term," the report concluded, "it is difficult to see why taxpayers would accept the financing of a policy that no longer provides a public good."

This is not the only area where Britain is about to accomplish something the EU has signally failed to do. In the 1990s and the 2000s, people in Britain protested against the export of live animals to the continent.

'Member states had been bickering for years about CAP reform...'

David Lane/shutterstock.com

Out of the EU, Britain can finally ban the export of live animals.

Yet nothing was done. Even recently, in 2019 70,000 sheep were trans-ported from the EU to Kuwait in temperatures of over 40 °C, and 14,000 sheep drowned when a boat bound for Libya sank off the coast of Romania.

At the beginning of December 2020 the government launched an eight-week consultation on animal welfare in transport, including a proposal for a ban on live exports for slaughter and fattening, a move described by the RSPCA as "a landmark achievement for animal welfare".

In a telling nod to the referendum campaign, an RSPCA blog has the subheading "We're taking back rightful control" over the conditions under which live animals are exported. We can leave behind the lax and ineffective EU standards and establish our own.

Britain could even tackle the question of land ownership. Just as we can require fishing vessels that fish in our waters to be British owned, so we could require our farmland to be British owned to qualify for subsidies, or, better still, outlaw foreign ownership of British land altogether. We are the masters now.

The advantages of independence become clearer, day by day, to all with eyes to see. The EU's terrible record on agriculture, the wine lakes and butter mountains, the dumping of chicken in west and southern Africa, the need to prop up small peasant proprietors in eastern Europe, need no longer constrain us.

But we still have some way to go to construct coherent agricultural policies that provide safe affordable food for workers. We must encourage the scientific research and manufacturing that a strong agricultural section of the economy needs.

Britain can only discuss and act on these questions because we decided as a nation to assert our independence and unity in June 2016. This is not sovereignty as discussed in the dry chapters of constitutional law textbooks. This is real sovereignty in action. ■

**The overwhelming reliance on road transport to keep the
the environment, and not least for passenger transport…**

Facing up to Britain's log

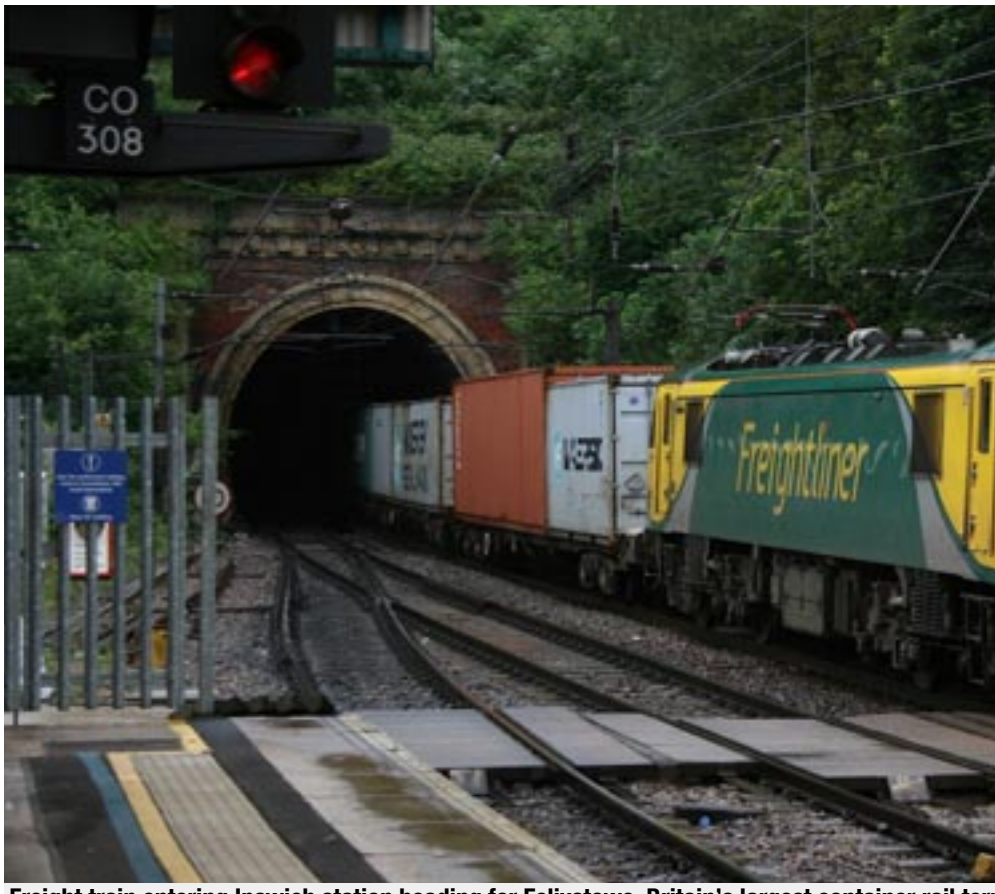
BRITAIN'S PEOPLE, its industry and economy are all self-evidently dependent on the transport of food, clothes, medicines and pharmaceuticals, other manufactured goods of all kinds, fuel, construction materials, raw materials, and waste materials. This transport of what is variously termed goods, freight or cargo along with its effective storage and distribution is these days often referred to as the logistics sector.

Around 1,620,000 people are employed in this sector in Britain, and a further 2,350,000 employed in related work such as maintenance and warehousing. This is about 7.6 per cent of the country's workforce.

Most of the nation's goods are moved on the same roads, railways and ferries that are used by people to get around, whether it is to or from work, on work related travel, or for leisure. The transport system for freight often sits uneasily with passenger journeys, not least in respect of health and safety.

Road transport accounts for most of the transport of freight – over 155 billion tonne-kilometres a year. Nearly half a million heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) ply the country's increasingly congested roads, along with a rapidly growing number of light goods vehicles – there are already over 4 million on the road.

In the age of the internet and online shopping, they move letters and approaching a billion parcels for the Post Office, Royal Mail and a plethora of large and small courier operators. They also deliver increasing volumes of food and other goods direct to people's front doors.



Roger Carvell (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Freight train entering Ipswich station heading for Felixstowe, Britain's largest container rail ter

Growing trend

All of this has of course increased markedly since the Covid-19 crisis began, fuelling a trend that had already seen a huge growth in what the media along with sneering politicians frequently refer to as "white van man" – small, self-employed and often poorly paid couriers.

This overwhelming reliance on road transport to keep the country functioning is a growing problem. All these goods vehicles contribute to increasing road congestion, which in itself means less efficiency and greater fuel consumption, leading to greatly increased costs.

Pollution from diesel emissions in particular is also a growing problem, with alternatives like battery electric goods vehicles probably decades away and carrying their own limits on sustainability. And heavy lorries are big contributors to highly damaging particulate pollution from tyres.

HGVs have progressively grown in size – economic pressures and EU directives have forced up the maximum permitted weight and length of trucks to 44 tonnes and 18.75 metres in length (over 60 feet). While very large vehicles are fine on motorways and modern roads, they often use roads that have barely changed in the last century and are totally unsuitable. Some towns and villages on these roads are literally being shaken apart.

It is no surprise that many want to see the road network enhanced, with more bypasses around towns and villages, and more modern roads and motorways built. But many others point to the fact that new roads tend to fill up as quickly as they are built, resulting in even more pollution. Continually increasing road space is therefore not a long-term solution.

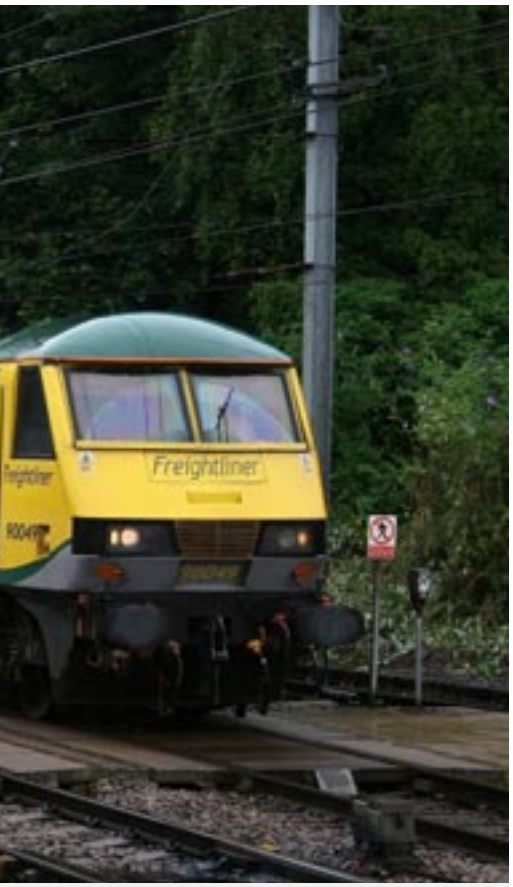
It is notable that the Welsh administration has abandoned plans to build a relief road around Newport (Gwent) to take pressure off the congested M4 motorway, instead plumping for a much enhanced public transport alternative.

There is a case for limited strategic enhancements to the national road network, such as the Lower Thames Crossing between Kent and Essex, but the days of large-scale motorway building are probably over. What is undoubtedly a popular demand is to get a significant volume of freight off the roads and on to railways (and other modes).

Road safety is a real concern. The

country functioning is a growing problem – for health, for

istics challenge



minal.

Campaign for Better Transport (CBT) states that HGVs are seven times more likely than cars to be involved in fatal collisions on minor roads despite them making up around 5 per cent of traffic – twice as bad as it was a decade ago. CBT compares this with the fact that cars have got much safer over the same period.

Competence

The safety awareness and competence of a significant number of HGV drivers leaves a lot to be desired. Too many blindly follow satellite navigation systems and go somewhere other than their intended destination, often ending up on a road that is completely unsuitable for their vehicle and then getting stuck.

Network Rail research recently found that 56 per cent of lorry drivers failed to plan their journeys adequately to take account of low bridges, and 32 per cent were setting off on journeys without knowing the height of their vehicle or load. This resulted in 1,787 drivers driving their lorries into railway bridges in 2019, an average of over 5 a day.

Not only does this represent a serious safety issue to road and rail users, but it causes increased congestion and is estimated to cost Britain's economy around £23 million a year.

It is easy to blame the drivers for all of this, but it is clear that too many are employed by haulage firms that relegate the safety of the public and their workers in favour of increasing their profits.

A recent warning letter to operators from the UK Senior Traffic Commissioner recognises the scale of the problem. The relatively low level of trade union organisation in the road haulage sector doubtless contributes to it.

The average age of HGV drivers increases year on year, with more than half of them over 50 – and nearly 15 per cent are over 60! There is already a serious shortage of HGV drivers, and this could become critical in the next decade as many retire. The unsocial hours of long-distance lorry driving coupled with the isolation may seem unattractive to younger people – despite pay rates which are often above average but could be much higher if the sector were organised.

So what are the alternatives to the roads? Well, in many cases there are none. Roads will always be the principal means of getting goods to the locations where they are needed. But a significant volume of freight could be moved off the roads, mainly onto rail, but some could also go to coastal shipping and inland waterways.

Each freight train currently takes 60 HGVs off the road, on average – but with planning more could be done: just one could carry goods equivalent to 136 HGVs. The total volume of rail freight moved has slumped to 17 billion net tonne-kilometres a year from the 22 billion net tonne-kilometres achieved from the mid-1990s until 2013-14 when coal traffic to power stations quickly declined to zero.

These days, rail carries other traffic. One in every four containers arriving at Britain's ports such as Felixstowe are carried inland by train.

'Just one freight train could carry goods equivalent to 136 HGVs…'

Rail is a much safer means of transporting freight than road, particularly hazardous materials such as nuclear waste. An increase in rail freight would see fewer HGVs and less congestion on roads leading to safer roads and less pollution.

Rail is more fuel efficient. And while there is a substantial network of electrified railways, many more could be electrified with the benefit that the electricity can increasingly come from clean non-polluting alternatives like renewables and nuclear.

Congested

The railways north from London were congested themselves as passenger numbers hit record levels at the point that the Covid-19 crisis hit. Freight train paths were squeezed out by passenger trains. While there is likely to be some reduction in passenger numbers and trains immediately after the Covid-19 crisis subsides, forecasters still see them climbing again.

That means that the additional capacity provided by the construction of HS2 is still badly needed to allow more freight trains to run on the West Coast Main Line in particular. The Covid-19 crisis passenger downturn may prove to provide a welcome opportunity for more freight trains to be run before HS2 opens for traffic.

That is why Logistics UK (formerly the Freight Transport Association), the body that speaks on behalf of all the players in Britain's freight transport, fully supports the construction of HS2. Its report on HS2 says "the full HS2 network will create space on the existing rail network for up to 144 extra freight trains per day, enabling more freight to travel between Southampton, London Gateway, Felixstowe, the Midlands, Ditton, Trafford Park and Scotland, all vital routes for supply chains." ■

Despite widespread agreement that the provision of socia reports and debates – little has changed for over a decade

Social care: essential bu

THE CORONAVIRUS pandemic and its impact on care homes should provide a stimulus to resolve the long-recognised problems with social care. But there is still little sign it will – despite an excellent, affordable set of remedies set out by the Dilnot Commission nine years ago.

Adult social care – looking after non-medical needs – costs over £50 billion each year. That does not take account of people whose families look after them or who have enough money to pay for care directly. These costs will rise as the number of older people increases significantly, and the care needs of working age people are expected to grow too.

Boris Johnson said when he became prime minster in July 2019 that his government would "…fix the crisis in social care once and for all with a clear plan we have prepared, to give every older person the dignity and security they deserve". In October 2020 he told the Conservative Party conference, "We will fix the injustice of care home funding. We will care for the carers as they care for us."

'Not much has changed with this government from the last…'

Reality

The reality is quite different; not much has changed with this government from the last. The then Chancellor Phillip Hammond announced in March 2017 that there would be a Green Paper (consultation) about social care and how it was funded. Nothing has really happened since then despite two general elections, a change of government and different ministers responsible. But they did find the time to reorganise and create a new Department of Health and Social Care.

Johnson promised that rather than an open-ended consultation, his government would set out definite proposals in a White Paper, but that has not appeared. Coronavirus is just one more reason nothing has been done.

Delayed release from hospital is often seen as the main impact of inadequate social care provision. Delayed release is certainly a big problem, costing the NHS in England over £450 million each year according to the National Audit Office, although not all of that is due to social care shortcomings.

The impacts of poor social care are more widespread. Firstly, the impact on those needing care themselves: their dignity and life are diminished. Without adequate care their health is affected, resulting in increased medical needs of many kinds. Family members often have to stop work or reduce hours. And for many there's the fear of the high costs of care.

The number of people needing social care is hard to estimate, as official figures are fragmented by devolution to Wales and Scotland and cover only those receiving support. But there were over a million people needing it in England alone in 2018/19, according to the Kings Fund. About 840,000 received long-term publicly funded

l care in Britain should be improved – and endless e…

ut overlooked

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care and a further 220,000 needed short-term care.

Those figures are expected to grow, primarily due to an ageing population. But there are other factors too – such as the rise in obesity and poor housing, both of which can drive the need for care support.

Again it's hard to estimate the number of paid carers due to the fragmented and largely private provision. But it's comparable to the NHS. The King's Fund estimates that there are 1.6 million – including care workers and registered nurses. Most are employed by small and medium-sized private homes. And there are around 140,000 employed directly by care users.

Pay

Employment in the care sector is notoriously low paid and poorly organised. In addition many care homes are not financially sound. Those relying on local authority placements find that what they receive does not meet costs. It was no surprise to anyone that the demands of responding to coronavirus found many wanting. But it's important to note that 67 per cent of all care homes in Britain reported no cases of Covid-19 infections amongst their patients by July 2020.

Care is funded through local authorities, paid for by central government funding and council tax. That's true for Wales and Scotland too, but those administrations with devolved powers make separate funding decisions. Just under half of the spending is on adults of working age.

Local authorities suffered cuts in social care funding between 2010/11 and 2014/15. Spending has risen since, including tranches of emergency funding, even before 2020. And despite protecting social care budgets at the expense of other responsibilities, local authorities argue, quite reasonably, that there's still a significant shortfall. That's due to both rising numbers and the rising cost of care.

And yet the situation is worse than that. Most of those who apply for care do not get support, frequently because of the financial means test operated in England and Wales. The funding of long-term care has been the sticking point which has delayed reform.

The idea of a service free at the point of care is obviously attractive. How might that be funded and organised? To add social care to NHS responsibilities isn't the answer. It would distract from what the NHS has to do and would not resolve either funding or organisational issues in care provision.

Alternatives

So what's the alternative? Returning social care to be a local authority function once again is not necessarily an answer. Social care has changed. Local authorities now rely on multiple fragmented private businesses or on people directly employing carers. That's neither efficient nor a sustainable basis for long term reform. So if there is not enough money for the current arrangements, how can we achieve free care at the point of delivery?

The TUC and Unison rightly point to the cuts in social care funding, the high number of vacancies in the sector and the prevailing low wages. But the problem goes much deeper.

The Dilnot Commission was set up in 2010 to address issues associated with care of the elderly. Its recommendations have not been implemented, but they are just as relevant today. It aimed to eliminate the catastrophic care costs some people faced by capping the amount individuals contribute over their lifetime. Beyond that the state would meet all future funding.

The idea was that limiting people's liability in this way would help to develop a market for financial products so that people can insure themselves against the cost that they were likely to incur. The Commission also recommended that those in need of residential care should make a standard contribution towards living costs.

Assets

More importantly it said that the asset threshold above which people in care are liable for its full cost should be raised from the current level of £23,250 up to £100,000. The asset threshold has not risen much since then while local authorities have struggled to balance their budgets. It also means even more people will face catastrophic funding costs or – more likely – just not get the care they need.

Dilnot said that criteria for services should be set nationally and needs assessments should be portable between local authorities to prevent a potential post-code lottery. Devolution to Wales and Scotland, and local authority regionalisation in England, have made uneven support worse. Any solution to the funding and organisation of care ought to return to national standards, even if delivered locally.

The Dilnot Commission's recommendations if implemented in full would have cost £1.7 billion for 2010/11 rising to £3.6 billion by 2025/26 (at 2010 costs), including forecast demographic changes. That's less than 1 per cent of GDP, and much less than the bank bailout after the 2007-2008 financial crisis.

There was no conceivable financial reason to stop these proposals being implemented. It was a political decision to marginalise the elderly and their families at a time in their lives of greatest need. The apparent government indecision since 2017 begins to look more like deliberate delay. ■

In this original and exciting book, Ben Pontin argues that i presents us with a real opportunity for environmental prot

Free to protect the envir

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Niederaussem, near Cologne: the most polluting power station in Europe, and yes, it's in Germany. So much for EU protection.

***The Environmental Case for Brexit: a socio-legal perspective*, by Ben Pontin, paperback, 168 pages, ISBN 978-1509946174 £21.99. Kindle and eBook editions available.**

THE VIEW that EU membership was necessary to protect the environment is false. The challenge for Britain now is to decide on our future best environmental actions. And as Ben Pontin shows in his meticulously documented book, this is best pursued through our domestic, national institutions.

The EU's founders wished to create environmental law from scratch. In contrast Britain was not willing to do so. Laws controlling the environment have been embedded in our national laws since at least the Alkali Act of 1861.

Britain considered it unnecessary and irresponsible to surrender to a new jurisdiction the established crafts of environmental law shaped by centuries of experience.

Pontin explains that, "Britain entered the Community believing it had the know-how, the tools, the legal craft-skills necessary to protect the environment without the help of a new, supranational jurisdiction."

The record proves that this confidence was justified. Britain is on track to comply with the ambitious 2008 Climate Change Act. For example, the country's target is to cut greenhouse gas emission by 57 per cent by 2030, against a baseline of 1990. The current reduction is 40 per cent. This is better than the EU's 23 per cent cut, against its relatively modest 2030 target of a 40 per cent cut.

These targets are in response to United Nations Climate Change Conferences. The EU is not the source of international climate action, as it tends to imply.

Britain is already "one of the least wasteful (or most waste preventative) in terms of municipal waste among the EU-9 (the Member States when Britain joined)", writes Pontin. But the difference between Britain and the EU in the approach to waste disposal has had damaging results.

The EU insisted on legislating against landfill. The 1985 report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution said landfill was Britain's "best practicable environmental option" for all materials other than those that are volatile or flammable.

What happened? The EU's 1999 Landfill Directive. This made the government change its plans for disposal of over 2 million tonnes of waste annually that it could no longer landfill in our preferred way. So it cost Britain twice as much to dispose of this waste. In turn that leads to exporting waste overseas because it is cheaper.

Pontin sums up the effect of the Landfill Directive as "a costly mistake not only for Britain but also for the EU. This is because it encapsulates the idea of rigid harmonisation and insensitivity to national sentiments that has contributed to the outcome of the 2016 Referendum."

The EU had a target of a third of protected natural habitats being rated as "favourable" or "unfavourable but recovering" by 2020. But by 2012 only 16 per cent of its sites had reached this standard. This was only a 1 per cent improvement since 2006. By contrast, Britain has a target of 95 per cent for its 7,000 sites of special scientific interest reaching that level.

Friends of the Earth claims that only the

"The EU Landfill Directive led to exporting waste overseas because it is cheaper."

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EU cleaned up our act. Not so. Pontin, a Professor of Law at Cardiff Law School, proves that their "claim that Britain's environment and environmental policy and law was relatively poor environmentally…does not withstand scrutiny." It is, like so much pro-EU advocacy, both untrue and defamatory of Britain's achievements. He concludes, "In none of the case studies is there evidence that the domestic environment is well protected through the EU-originated aspect of domestic law."

Professor Pontin sums up that on the criteria of simplicity, rationality, accountability and autonomy, "given a choice between a British way independent of the EU environmental acquis* on the one hand, and one tied to it on the other, my core conclusion is that each of these criteria support independence."

The prime minister announced accelerated emissions reduction targets on 3 December. Whether these are achievable or realistic depends on many factors, including manufacturing capability. But the choices Britain makes on the environment will no longer be hampered by the EU.

* The body of common rights and obligations that are binding on all EU countries, as EU members. ■

@CPBML

Born 200 years ago, Friedrich Engels played a great part i class movement in the 19th century, particularly in Britain

Friedrich Engels, born 1

FRIEDRICH ENGELS was born on 28 November 1820 in Barmen, a growing industrial town in Germany's Rhineland. Europe was recovering from the Napoleonic wars and about to enter a long period of political and economic change.

Engels, whose contributions are not always fully recognised, played a full role as a writer and political leader until his death in 1895. By the end of his life modern industrialisation had spread from north west Europe across the world.

In that time capitalism had matured into an international system, recognisable today. The working class grew as capitalism expanded, developing both its organisation and thinking to inspire the revolutions of the twentieth century.

Engels moved to Manchester in 1842, working for two years in his father's textile firm, which had a mill there. He had already written articles critical of German society and had begun to think of himself as a socialist. But in Manchester, Engels transformed his view of the world.

Crisis

Britain had just been through a great economic crisis. There were strikes against wage cuts and agitation for working class political representation through the People's Charter. But the capitalist class had reasserted itself in a brutal way. Chartist leaders were arrested; the movement never regained its momentum. Wages were not improved, but trade unions began to reorganise in new ways.

Engels explored Manchester, the centre of British industry, and other industrial towns. He talked to workers, debated with trade unionists and wrote for socialist publications. He read all he could and studied the state of the working class.

From this experience Engels wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, published in German 1845. And although it was not translated into English for over 40 years, the conclusions he drew influenced later political activity and thinking – his own and that of many others, including Karl Marx.

Other writers had described the raw, desperate struggle for survival in the early years of capitalism – Britain was the first country to experience this. But unlike Engels they were visitors; they viewed the appalling working conditions and poverty as the fault of workers or a necessary evil to be moderated where possible.

In contrast Engels took his observations and asked himself why things were that way. He did not ascribe this to the evil intent of individual capitalists but saw that it was a product of that economic system. He foresaw that other countries would experience the same path – Germany, France, USA and so on.

Engels dealt with workers as a class and looked beyond pauperism. Henry Mayhew wrote *London Labour and the London Poor* a few years later, describing similar conditions. But that lacks an analysis or understanding of the working class; it is of interest only as a vision of its time.

Unemployment

In contrast Engels takes his detailed, systemic survey and analyses the political and economic developments that created what he saw. He was probably the first to identify and articulate the need of capitalism to have a "reserve army" of the unemployed to create competition between workers and to keep wages down. That's a commonplace idea now, but was radical then.

Engels describes how workers defended themselves and how their experiences drove them towards organisation and acting as a class with the same economic position in society and the same economic interests. Also a radical view.

The concept of a class with a common interest leads to the idea that workers have their fate in their own hands and need not rely on others, even well intentioned liberals. At the time in Britain those liberals were arguing for abolition of the Corn Laws and for free trade. But workers understood that for the most part their motivation was not altruism but to reduce costs for manufacturing capitalists – that is, wages.

'Engels examined the economic laws driving capitalism and its cycles of boom and bust…'

Workers

Statue of Friedrich Engels (right) with Karl Marx,

Engels also used his studies to examine the economic laws driving capitalism and its cycles of boom and bust. Yet the idea that capitalism can be modified to eliminate unemployment and crises still persists 150 years later in the thinking of too many workers. It's worth going back to what Engels wrote, not to be horrified by the conditions described, but to gain a better understanding of how capitalism worked then and now.

In 1844 Engels met Karl Marx, with whom he had already started to correspond. Over the next three years Engels was engaged in developing his political thinking and practical activities among German workers in Brussels and Paris.

This led Engels and Marx to set out the main principles of the socialism they had worked out in the *Communist Manifesto*, first published in 1848. It emphasised that

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"the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle accounts with its own bourgeoisie."

Marx and Engels saw the working class as thinking beings who can wage and win the struggle for socialism. They always stressed that "The emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself."

After the defeat of the 1848 revolution in Germany, Marx settled in London. Engels became a clerk again back in Manchester in 1850. They maintained a lively exchange of ideas, corresponding almost daily until Engels joined Marx in London in 1870.

In London Engels took part in working class political activity again. Over many years he contributed to and edited *Capital*, Marx's key work on political economy, and wrote works of his own about socialism and society. But his early experience in Manchester was the foundation on which he built his work. ■

Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.

ABOUT US

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

All our members are thinkers, doers and leaders. All are expected to work to advance our class's interests. All must help to develop 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 colleagues and friends to embrace the Marxist practice and theory that alone can lead to the revolution that Britain needs. Marx's understanding of capitalism is a powerful tool – the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 explains the crash of 2007/8.

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

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

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

We hold public meetings around Britain (Covid permitting), in-depth 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.

We are not an elite, intellectually superior to our fellow workers. All that 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. The real teacher is the fight itself, and in particular the development of ideas and confidence that comes from collective action.

Interested in these ideas?

- Get in touch to find out how to take part. Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class.
- Subscribe to *Workers*, our bimonthly magazine, either online at cpbml.org.uk or by sending £15 for a year's issues (cheques payable to Workers) to the address below. UK only. Email for overseas rates.
- Sign up for our free email newsletter – see the form at www.cpbml.org.uk

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Coronavirus: workers taking control

‘Almost at a stroke, large-scale vaccine manufacturing has been restored to Britain. It shows what can be done: Britain can be rebuilt…’

NOTHING ILLUSTRATES the potential of collective and people-led organisation like the response of British workers to the Covid-19 pandemic. Faced with a threat unprecedented in recent history, Britain’s workers got on with the job. The results are before us now, in particular with imminent success on the vaccines front.

We have come a long way since 2018, when business secretary Greg Clark’s feeble announcement of inadequate funding at the launch of the Vaccines Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (VMIC) set the tone. Now tens of millions of doses of the Oxford University/AstraZeneca chimpanzee virus-based vaccine will be produced by Oxford Biomedica in a “virtual” partnership with the now far better funded VMIC.

Whatever the eventual use of the Oxford vaccine (whether on its own or in combination with, for example, the Russian Sputnik vaccine) the achievements so far are immense. Almost at a stroke, large-scale vaccine manufacturing has been restored to Britain. It shows what can be done: Britain can be rebuilt. All that is needed is the will and the ambition – and for the working class to take control.

Vaccine development is not the only success area. Take, as one example out of many, the research in a paper published in July into dexamethasone, a widely used and relatively cheap anti-inflammatory drug. At just £5 per treatment, it was shown by British researchers to reduce death in Covid-19 patients on ventilators by up to a third – a life saver on an epic scale.

As the notes in the Appendix of the published paper show, this was an “investigator-initiated trial”. No big funder, no government department, no company had the bright idea of starting it. Researchers themselves began it, rapidly finding time and funding. Scientists – workers – took responsibility.

No fewer than 176 hospitals – all NHS – were involved in the trial, the length and breadth of the country: from Cardiff to Glasgow, from the Isle of Wight to the Western Isles. The coordinated, national initiative makes a mockery of the petty regionalism that has marred the public health response to the crisis.

It’s no accident that this research was carried out here. Where else in the world would you have had such a massive study carried out in record time and yielding such powerful results? But then again, where else in the (capitalist) world do you have an NHS?

Early on in the crisis, when Britain was desperately short of testing facilities and PPE, many scientists not researching Covid-19 organised themselves, with no urging from above, to provide backup support.

These included the Crick Institute in London, the largest single workplace of biomedical researchers in Europe, where the labs were turned over for testing. In another example, chemists at Imperial College London started making their own hand sanitiser for distribution locally.

And now, according to government predictions, Britain was on course to make 70 per cent of its PPE here from the start of December 2020. It’s a far cry from the farcical goings on that saw the RAF fly in a planeload of PPE from Turkey, only for many of the gowns to be ditched as being of too low quality.

But the working class must do more than take responsibility locally, in a crisis, over limited areas. Once this struggle against the virus is over, there must be no return to sit-back-and-moan approach that has characterised so much of the working-class response to the failing system of capitalism.

On 1 January Britain finally left the clutches of the EU’s regulatory systems. Good riddance. Independence beckons. Now workers will have to harness their collective experience and knowledge and apply their collective energy to the task of taking control of the direction of the country. There should be no self-doubt: if Covid-19 has shown anything, it is that workers truly can change the world. ■