

WORKERS

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WORKERS, TAKE CHARGE OF BRITAIN!

Teachers Offer rejected **Pay** Unison calls time
Electric vehicles The true facts **Class control** In practice
Transport Demand better **May Day** Celebrate!
Universities Pay fight resumes *plus* Historic Notes,
Britain No to separatism! News and more

WORKERS



Take charge, keep charge

THE RESURGENCE in working class struggle – after years of relative quiet – is proof that progress is possible. And it’s no surprise that it centres on pay, the heart of the relationship between employers and employed.

Yet in the past big upturns in working class activity have been frittered away, with the rule of capital managing to re-establish itself. The 1970s are a notable example. And industrial action tapered off in the early 1990s too after making a comeback in the late 1980s.

Today we are at a promising juncture, but to make progress for our class all involved must embrace a convincing strategy. There is one necessary premise. Workers must keep charge over matters at work and in society, not let their guard drop, nor allow the recently gained active involvement to lapse whatever happens as specific disputes reach temporary settlements.

It will take a protracted approach to shift the balance of power between the ruling class and the working class.

And responsibility for advance can never be handed over to others. Workers must disengage from reliance on parliamentary parties and end the ruinous habit of fawning over a Labour Party that has never produced the goods, and never will. Our salvation depends on us, alone.

Instead struggle must spread further, into more spheres and sectors of society. We

strengthen our influence when we govern events by action. That’s the way to increase our power and rebuild the labour movement.

Nor should we make a fetish of strikes. Action short of a strike, “working to rule” and dictating collective restrictions over the amount of work to be done, is often effective – and sustainable. Many recent pay struggles have been well conducted, avoiding the lure of unfeasible all-out strikes and instead adopting a more guerrilla approach.

We should not cede the initiative to a system that wants to stifle our aims. As pay settlements are reached – and sooner or later they will be – the return to work cannot be a case of “as you were”. In factories, offices, schools and hospitals, workplace trade union organisation has sprung to life again. It must not be allowed to die back.

An answer to the problems of existence under capitalism does not reside in Westminster shenanigans, still less in separatist or regional assemblies. All are talking shops that endorse the operations of finance capital and big business that have no interest in the lives of workers.

There is no alternative to relying on ourselves, for workers are the only true source of progress.

There should be no pause in effort, just changes of emphasis and intensity of struggle. For Britain to work in our interests, we must act for fundamental change. No one else will. ■

Cover shows striking junior doctors at Whipps Cross Hospital, London. Photo Workers.



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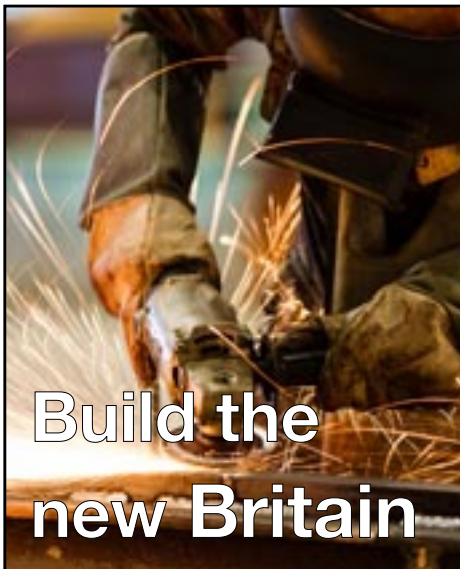
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Workers

Unison members at the start of the 2022 pay ballot campaign.

Unison calls time on pay body

A HISTORIC DECISION was taken at the Unison Health Care Service Group Conference in Bournemouth on 18 April when members unanimously backed a motion to “call time” on the NHS Pay Review Body (PRB) system. They will now seek direct negotiations on pay.

Gordon McKay from the Unison service group executive told the conference, “The PRB was never independent, the government picked their chair and gave them their remit.”

It is a significant lesson learnt from this year’s pay dispute and one that has taken 40 years to come to fruition: previous motions calling for the dissolution of the PRB have been rejected on multiple occasions. The motion will mean that Unison will now begin to work towards a collective bargaining model across Britain.

But there are fears that this leap forward in terms of the PRB will be hampered if other aspects of joint union working are not valued. The Royal College of Nursing, which submitted a separate claim at the start of this pay dispute, is now seeking a nurses-only (indeed, an RCN-only) pay scale.

The national bargaining structure of the NHS is important, as is the achievement of the joint working of the 14 unions in this structure. And even where financial control of the NHS is devolved, as in Wales and Scotland, it is still the reference point for pay awards. ■

PENSIONS REFORM

New risks

CHANCELLOR JEREMY Hunt, speaking at the International Monetary Fund meeting on 13 April 2023, said that the British pension system needs reform to ensure pensioners receive higher returns.

Hunt wants Britain’s pensions industry to provide investment into high-growth British industries. The chancellor cited countries such as Australia and Canada, which allow pension funds “to invest in unlisted and potentially higher growth vehicles...”

Asked if pension schemes should be forced to invest in the stock market as opposed to lower risk bonds, Hunt said he preferred to give financial institutions “...complete freedom to invest where they think they will get the best returns...”

Debate about this possible reform has up to now been confined mainly to those who are close to the speculative sections of finance capital. Workers whose pensions may be affected will be concerned about the idea of increased risk and using pension funds for speculation. ■

FACTS MATTER

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

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



ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at cpbml.org.uk

Foundations

A new statement on the fundamental approach of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) – to class, country, independence and control.

What is Internationalism?

Control over borders is the best way for a country to develop its economy and benefit its people. Such self-determination and independence serve the cause of workers everywhere.

The political economy of taking control

Since the 2008 crash governments have increased the money supply, with no improvement in productivity. This imbalance is the main cause of the current inflation.

Census data concern

The 10-yearly population census is intended to be a valuable source of data for national research and planning. But there are serious questions about the validity of the latest census results.

School sport: Lionesses hit the net

Spurred by the England Lionesses, the government chose International Women's Day to announce support for equal access to school sport, football in particular.

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.



Demonstration against the expansion of the London ULEZ (Ultra Low Emissions Zone), Trafalgar Square, London, 15 April.

ULEZ scheme challenged

THE HIGH COURT has granted a judicial review of the expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone beyond the existing Inner London Congestion Charge zone up to the boundaries of Greater London. The review will be heard in July.

The four outer London councils challenging the legality of the London mayor's plan, plus neighbouring Surrey County Council, are acting in effect under mandate from their residents and businesses together with taxi drivers, sole traders and others who need to cross borough boundaries for work.

The extension will cost drivers of non-compliant older vehicles £12.50 a day from August. Simply, local people accuse the London mayor, Sadiq Khan, of ignoring their democratic right to public consultation and debate.

Their rally in Trafalgar Square on 15 April, under the campaign banner "Together", was an exercise in democratic debate. The many conflicting aspects of road pricing and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods were discussed: the undisputed importance of clean air; the unintended consequences of traffic reduction, such as bottlenecks and rat runs through residential streets, shifting pollution to new areas; the proliferation of enforcement cameras; delays to fixed-route bus services; the harm to the high streets; the differing needs of outer London; the inadequacy of the mayor's vehicle scrappage scheme; and the severe impact on all who cannot afford to upgrade their cars to avoid the daily charge.

The general view at the rally was that the ULEZ is a money-making scheme (£226 million in fines in 2022) to compensate for the under-funding of public transport in London. "It was never about air quality" said the leader of Bexley Council. ■

ROYAL MAIL

Dispute settled

ROYAL MAIL postal delivery workers have settled their complex pay struggle after 11 months of well supported industrial action. The Communications Workers Union finally reached an agreement on 15 April 2023 that they will put to members.

CWU general secretary Dave Ward called it "an agreement that can stand the test of time, that moves us forward and moves the company forward...after the most bitter, most intense and high-risk dispute this union's ever been involved in."

Along with pay and conditions, CWU workers have been defending a universal

postal delivery service against a privatised company that would really just like to get rid of it. They even threatened to put it into government administration if a deal was not agreed.

The agreement is a compromise – a 10 per cent pay increase and a lump sum of £500. But this has to reach back to April 2022 and extend through to April 2025.

The CWU has forced the company to abandon the introduction of owner-drivers and other attacks on conditions. But delivery start times will move to after 7am and there will be new seasonal working patterns. ■

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

FOOD

Rip-off revealed

AT THE END of March *Farmers Weekly* journalist Abi Kay revealed that British farmers were being ripped off by an industrial-scale country of origin fraud whereby a food manufacturer was passing off huge quantities of foreign pork as British.

And these criminal practices have been going on for two decades. In addition, the processor has been accused by former employees of “washing” hams that are visibly off or mixing rotting pork with fresh

product for further processing. Meat processed by the company ended up in ready meals and other produce sold in stores including Tesco, Asda, Coop, Morrisons and Marks and Spencer.

The method utilised by this criminal network would involve the processor buying a relatively small volume of British meat from a retailer-approved supplier, then using the traceability information from this delivery for all the pork products it made in that week – with most of the meat coming from elsewhere in the world. ■

• See more at www.cpbml.org.uk.



UCU members out on the streets in Glasgow, 14 February.

University pay fight resumes

ON 17 APRIL University and College Union declared that university members have won a “historic victory” in achieving restoration of their pension. Three days later, they resumed their other battles with the employers, on pay and working conditions.

After several weeks of the all-out strike days which led to the pensions success, the union has now changed tack, with over 35,000 UCU members voting to pursue further industrial action in the form of a marking and assessment boycott.

The boycott, involving 145 universities, is targeted at stopping summative (that is, final) assessment at undergraduate, Master’s and doctoral level. General Secretary Jo Grady explained: “University staff have been clear that they want a better deal, and it is in the interests of employers to make an enhanced offer and prevent serious disruption hitting graduations.”

The action is despite many UCU members receiving outrageous threats from employers. While many universities are implementing a punitive 30 per cent pay deduction for workers engaging directly in the action, many have been told they are facing 50 per cent or even 100 per cent pay deductions. The aim is to break members’ resolve as quickly as possible.

Knowing that the legal system in Britain is stacked against working people, the union has developed a plan to put maximum pressure on employers immediately. This includes using local press and national media to expose those employers who move to punitive deductions, and escalating to strike action in universities where these deductions take place.

Staff members who don’t have marking and assessment in their workload, and therefore who won’t lose any pay, will participate in the action by contributing to the local and national fighting funds from which those engaged in the boycott can claim the pay they are losing.

The union position is clear: it will not bow down to intimidation. The employers can end this now by tabling a renewed offer on pay and working conditions. It’s that or the union will take the dispute to an even higher level. ■

WHAT'S ON

Coming soon

MAY

CPBML May Day Meetings

Celebrate International Workers’ Day 2023 at the CPBML’s May Day meetings. On May Day we take stock of Britain and the world. In the past year, many British workers have joined battle with the employers, showing discipline, unity and tactical ingenuity. The class as a whole is strengthened. How, then, to move forward?

Glasgow, *In person*: Monday 1 May, 7pm

Renfield Conference Centre, 260 Bath Street, G2 4JP

London, *In person*: Monday 1 May, 7.30pm

Brockway Room, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1R 4RL

Manchester, *In person*: Monday 1 May, 1pm

Email info@cpbml.org.uk for details

Bristol, *In person*: Saturday 6 May 2023, 2pm

Room G01, Tony Benn House, Unite the Union, Victoria Street, BS1 6AY

Tuesday 23 May, 7pm

***Online* discussion meeting (via Zoom)**

“Britain out of NATO!”

Discuss why Britain should leave NATO – and why staying out of international military conflicts is good for workers everywhere. Email info@cpbml.org.uk for an invitation.

JUNE

Thursday 22 June, 7.30pm

***In person* CPBML public meeting**

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL

“Who should run London?”

London was once “the flower of cities all” and a centre of working class organisation. Now that control has been usurped. How shall we take it back? Come and discuss. All welcome.

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

The well crafted and deliberate attacks on education by government believe this is a critical point in the struggle to arrest decline

Teachers reject pay offer



Striking teachers demonstrating in Manchester on 1 February this year. Photo Workers.

AFTER THE HUGE disruption to education caused by the pandemic, and the subsequent impact on children's learning and mental health, you might think that every effort would be made to remedy the damage to our children's education.

But that's not the reality in schools. The ongoing decline in education is actually accelerating. Teachers and pupils face a maelstrom of attacks by the government – failure to recruit, poor pay, high stress, underfunding, and an inspection regime correctly described as “unfit for purpose”. All feed off each other to reinforce this downward spiral.

The attacks are no accident, but education workers are now resisting. They recognise that they are at a critical point in their fight to halt the decline.

The National Education Union has for some years gone through the motions of wishing for an improvement in pay. At last, things have changed. At this year's national

conference the pay debate took place in an entirely different atmosphere. Far from making token gestures, delegates displayed real anger at the contempt government has shown for teachers in their ongoing pay campaign in England.

Support for the strike action was shown mid-conference when the result of the consultative ballot on the latest pay offer was announced. An overwhelming 98 per cent of teachers voted to reject it, on a turnout of 66 per cent. In less than six days over 190,000 serving teachers in English state schools had voted to reject the offer.

Commenting on the result, Mary Boustead and Kevin Courtney, joint general secretaries of the NEU, said, “The offer shows an astounding lack of judgement and understanding of the desperate situation in the education system...This resounding rejection of the Government's offer should leave Gillian Keegan (Secretary of State for Education) in no doubt that she will need to

come back to the negotiating table with a much better proposal.”

The union had already held four days of national strike action. It announced the addition of three further strike days to the two already planned for the summer term.

Other teaching unions had held strike ballots but failed to meet the required 50 per cent threshold of members taking part. Drawing strength from the position of the NEU, they announced that they also reject the offer and would now consider re-balloting their members.

Head teachers

In a ballot of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), 90 per cent voted to reject the pay offer, and 78 per cent said they wanted to vote again on taking industrial action. Like the NEU, headteachers have continually highlighted that most of the government's offer is unfunded and will result in further cuts to staff.

Government are now being resisted by workers, who
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er in fight for education



Workers

Paul Whiteman, NAHT general secretary, said his members felt “insulted” by the offer but emphasised that even one so low is “not affordable in their (school) budgets”. It is not surprising that head teachers rejected such an unfunded offer.

Teachers know that any pay increase only partially funded by government would see teachers’ pay in England fall even further behind their counterparts in Wales and Scotland. It would also represent another two years of real term pay cuts.

The teachers’ pay and workload campaigns are highlighting the inadequate salaries and poor working conditions.

No wonder the recruitment of new staff is in crisis, as shown by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), an independent educational research charity, in its annual report on the teacher labour market. It makes grim reading. For example, teacher vacancies have doubled since the start of the pandemic.

There’s not much hope from government, which acknowledges that it has missed its overall targets for initial teacher training for this academic year. And missed them by miles: by nearly 30 per cent below target overall, for secondary teachers alone by over 40 per cent, and for physics by an astonishing 83 per cent.

The shortfalls in initial recruitment are exacerbated by the exodus of staff early on in their career. Government figures show that one in three teachers left the profession after just five years. This is likely to worsen. Surveys indicate that 44 per cent of teachers in state schools in England and Wales plan to leave within the next five years.

Despite token attempts to reduce workloads, most teachers surveyed for the NFER report felt that their workload continued to be unmanageable. The OECD five-yearly international survey of teachers’ workload showed that secondary teachers in England worked 20 per cent longer than the average of those in other countries. And only primary teachers in Japan had a longer working day.

Ofsted is often cited as a source of added stress and as a big reason for teachers leaving the profession. Teaching unions have long campaigned for its reform, or replacement by a more effective means of supporting schools and informing parents.

The tide is turning as teachers’ anger grows. There is more willingness to take action to defend education. The BBC summarised this with the headline “The dam has burst on strength of feeling”.

Punitive

The tragic death of Ruth Perry, head teacher of Caversham Primary School in Reading, has highlighted the poor mental health of teachers, particularly among senior leaders. The punitive nature of Ofsted inspections has caused some within the organisation to reflect on their role.

An experienced inspector, Dr Martin Hanbury, left his job saying, “You’re conscious that you’re causing perhaps more harm than good.” The one-word grading system is, he said, “totally unfit for purpose”.

The quality of Ofsted inspections has always been a concern for schools. Coupled with an arbitrary grading system, this has meant that many in education regard the

‘Any pay increase only partially funded would see pay fall even further...’

process as having limited authority, and providing poor support for schools.

The government claims that the four Ofsted grades of “outstanding” to “inadequate” are a guide for parents and a spur to schools. Schools reject this as inaccurate and simplistic. And education researchers have also panned the claims for misleading parents choosing a school for their children.

Ofsted’s claim to independence is now in question. It has tried to bolster the government’s contentious changes to the curriculum by looking for support from evidence-based research. This has backfired.

Academics complain that some of their research has been misrepresented to fit with the government’s agenda. Other research cited is of poor quality – for example, relying on small samples or no investigation at all.

Ofsted also included many research papers which did not even support its conclusions – over 25 per cent, according to the Association of Mathematics Education Teachers. Even by cherry-picking research, Ofsted has not made the case, which seems particularly desperate – one might say “inadequate”.

The issues causing the spiralling fall in the quality of education have become entrenched and are reinforcing each other. This decline is likely to develop further over the coming months. These problems cannot all be resolved quickly, but the government isn’t going to solve any of them unless forced to do so.

Those with a vision for education’s future will need to be ready to tackle and overcome the trials ahead. The willingness of workers in education to stand and fight is a step in the right direction. It will help give them the clarity of thought and resolve they will need for their long-term struggle. ■

**It is time to examine the case for electric vehicles. The argu-
reality. Investment is needed, not imposed targets...**

The truth about the claim



Wei Huang/shutterstock.com

Electric chargers, Crouch End, north London.

THE BRITISH government's pursuit of net zero by 2050 has brooked no argument, scientific or otherwise, and there has been no meaningful consultation. Previously locked into an EU energy strategy which decreed the banning of petrol and diesel cars by 2035, the government has, post Brexit, sought to be even more zealous, bringing forward the ban to 2030.

Developments at the end of March have brought the EU ban into open debate. In the face of hostility from German and other European car manufacturers, the EU has climbed down from its previous position. It will permit the sale of internal combustion engine vehicles, provided they run on carbon neutral petrol alternatives.

The problem is that these synthetic fuels

are prohibitively expensive for passenger vehicles. This will no doubt prompt a further stand-off between the EU and the manufacturers nearer the 2035 cut-off. All this could leave Britain isolated by insisting the ban stays.

It is time to examine the case for electric vehicles. Workers come to it from a different perspective from that of European car manufacturers – some workers may have jobs in the industry, but mostly they rely on vehicles in their work and to get to work.

Battered

Workers are already battered by initiatives springing up all round Britain – ultra-low emission zones, clean air zones, low traffic zones. Some have campaigned vigorously

against them, particularly the rapid imposition of ultra-low emission zones.

The Local Government Association, charged with implementing the net zero initiatives, has published *The case for electric vehicles*, which clearly articulates the government's position. Its first sentence reads, "It is widely accepted that electric vehicles (EVs) will have lower running costs, are quieter, better for the environment and simpler to repair." These assumptions need questioning.

The first claim, on running costs, is deliberately misleading. The true cost of running a car includes purchase price, the cost of fuel, the cost of repairs and maintenance, insurance, and an incremental component towards eventual replacement.

arguments, rooted in net zero dogma, don't stand up to

Claims for electric vehicles

Battery electric vehicle (BEV) sales have been rising, accounting for 267,000 out of a total of 1.6 million new vehicles registered last year. But they are expensive; Tesla models for instance, one-fifth of the BEV market, cost from £40,000 upwards. And cheaper BEVs like the Renault Zoe, at just under £30,000, are far more expensive than their petrol equivalents: the Renault Clio for example costs £18,000.

According to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, most electric vehicle sales have been for company car fleets, benefitting from tax incentives. To be on target for the 2030 cut off, EV sales would need to increase by 10 per cent year on year.

There is no evidence that the majority of individual drivers who currently buy diesel and petrol vehicles will be able to afford to change to EVs. Leasing one instead is not necessarily affordable: EV leases are about 50 per cent dearer than for petrol or diesel cars.

Battery life

The simplicity of electric motors and transmission, with fewer mechanical parts to go wrong, suggests that repairs and maintenance could be cheaper than for conventional cars. But then there's the battery, which represents half the cost of the vehicle. Its configuration under the car means it can be readily damaged, even in a minor bump. As yet there are very few mechanics qualified to work on them – and as a result, many are written off after slight damage.

Claims for the longevity of these batteries ought to be viewed with some scepticism –

– are they only obtainable under laboratory conditions? A Tesla warranty, for example, covers the battery for just eight years. Many motorists want a car they can keep for longer than that. Operational factors including temperature and the use of fast chargers will reduce battery efficiency and therefore effective range.

And it is range, or rather the lack of it, which also makes EVs so unappealing to regular motorists. Manufacturers' claims of ranges from 200 to 400 miles between charges, even if accurate, rule out even moderately lengthy return journeys without the need to recharge.

The present inadequate charging infrastructure requires EV drivers to plan in detail where to charge for longer journeys. But in some major cities as many as a quarter of charging points may be out of service at any one time. Motorway driving is little better; it's a common experience to find some chargers out of service and lengthy queues at the others.

Even if far more chargers were to be installed, would the already overstretched national grid be reliable enough to support them? Government has no answer to the question of how power generation is going to keep up with the increasing demand for EVs implied by its targets.

The government asserts that no driver on an A road or motorway is ever more than 25 miles from a charging point. That's no help to the many people driving in Wales, Scotland and the rural areas of England.

The LGA's claim about quieter running is undoubtedly true for EVs at low speeds, but it is misleading. The greatest contributor to road noise is the sound made by tyres, not engines; and that proportion increases the higher the speed.

Environmental cost

The argument that EVs are better for the environment has to be similarly qualified. Manufacturing EVs has an environmental impact in mining lithium and cobalt, essential for the batteries. It has a terrible human cost too, although that can't be wholly attributable to EVs.

Undeniably burning fossil fuels in internal combustion engines produces harmful emissions – particulate matter, nitrogen

oxides, sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide – as well as carbon dioxide, the principal greenhouse gas.

Successive legislation has required car manufacturers to produce less-polluting engines. Technical advances have dramatically reduced this pollution from emissions – down by 90 per cent since 1996. But that's not the only cause of pollution by vehicles.

A study by scientists at Imperial College, reported in the *Guardian* on 23 February this year, showed that over half of small particle pollution on British roads came from tyre and brake wear. A further quarter is due to the abrasion of roads and their markings. This kind of pollution increases with vehicle weight. EVs with their big batteries are significantly heavier than their petrol equivalents. That added weight also massively increases the damage to life and limb in the event of a collision.

The LGA "case", made on behalf of the government, amounts to no more than recycling platitudes with an apparent scientific veneer. These don't stand up to scrutiny. Laughably, they describe government policy as "...encouraging a transition away from internal combustion engines and towards ultra-low emission vehicles, including EVs, over the next 20 years".

Compulsion

It looks as if encouragement is not working, so compulsion is now the order of the day – banning petrol and diesel cars and enforced targets for the proportion of EV vehicles sold. Yet that policy can't avoid the reality that EVs are at present unaffordable for many workers who need to travel.

Can this change? Can EVs replace petrol and diesel cars? Battery technology is the key. It has come a long way but is not yet near being the basis of mass motor manufacture. More research and development are needed to achieve that, but the government isn't committed.

Government policy is less about developing technology and capacity here and more about burnishing its green credentials. It talks about grants for buying EVs but fails to support firms like Britishvolt. It announces grand investment plans and lets them wither. That will have to change for Britain to take advantage of the potential of EVs. ■

'In some major cities as many as a quarter of charging points may be out of order at any one time...'

Control is the power of directing what happens in a country that has quite a different meaning for workers than for capitalists.

Creating class control in



Workers

CONTROL OF events is important in determining what goes on in Britain and in the lives of individual workers. Capitalism runs the economy and capitalists form the ruling class. But that does not mean workers are without power and influence.

The working class can exert control by what it says and does. Huge picket lines outside a London hospital, full of young smiling nurses with union banners and invented homemade banners, shouting for more pay. In Manchester, striking teachers marching in support of their pay claim, again with homemade banners. In Glasgow, striking civil servants with a sea of union banners saying “Enough is enough”.

The homemade banners declare what’s driving action: “The NHS will last as long as we fight for it”; “Teachers strike now – for the teachers of tomorrow”; “Stop calling us heroes. I’m surrounded by incredible professionals who deserve better”.

Collective

The mass of trade union banners held on picket lines of workers in dispute adhere to their trade union organisation and use handwritten slogans expressing their understanding of what they are fighting for. And workers are carrying them, not in their free time at the weekend, but as strikers during the working day.

All this asserts that the government has given up on the people. That only workers are prepared to fight for a future for Britain. That’s taking control of events as workers.

We don’t yet know the full significance of these events, but there’s definitely something in the air. For the most part young workers are behind the banners – a shift that should not be underestimated.

For example, the National Education Union seemed moribund. Young teachers felt ground down by overwork, poor conditions and effective pay cuts and unable to change anything. Teachers left the profession after just a few years, older colleagues too often burnt out and cynical.

Few people wanted to take on union

Postal workers demonstrating in London last year as part of the protracted struggle over pay.

ry, or an industry. We say workers must take control, but capitalists...

in practice

posts and many schools were without a rep. Union structures and activities were more and more about divisions in the class and not what united them – the place of work and the profession.

Such problems won't quickly go away, but these current actions are signs of a resurgence. A new generation is pushing through. They do not look back to past glories, but are gathering the energy and courage to organise in their schools – working out how to organise in their own workplaces, taking responsibility.

This visible development, workers full of spirit and humour, builds collective strength. Two weeks after announcing the NEU ballot in favour of strike action, the union's 300,000 membership had grown by 40,000. Teachers want to fight.

In a fight with the employer, collective action by workers is our best and only tool on the route to taking control. Involvement, responsibility, acting together are the key. Empty slogans from the sidelines won't cut it.

Statement

Action is a statement – we won't be told what to do. But that only works if we are prepared to act collectively. Passive dissatisfaction is rejecting control; giving control to the employer or the government.

A qualitative change happens when we as organised workers decide enough is enough and do something to defend ourselves, and claim a right to more pay. And that's what's going on now.

This process is how trade unions were built in Britain: from the bottom up, by workers in the workplace. This began long ago, in the Middle Ages, and has been evident every time workers have rebuilt and refreshed their organisations.

Political

There is always a political element at the heart of workers' actions every time we combine against an employer or a landlord or a landowner to assert our interests. And it need not be in a trade union, but might be a campaign group fighting to preserve agricultural land for food production or open spaces for recreation.

Where there is conflict between the two

classes the state, in the form of the government of the day, shows its real nature. It seeks control only for profit-making and nothing for the wellbeing of the people.

On the other hand workers seek control for the wellbeing of the vast majority of the people, and of the country itself. And the experience of struggle teaches the nature of class conflict.

Lost control

Fighting is dangerous. At present the capitalist class (employer, government and state) has lost control of the story of what's happening – there's wide support for those who fight for pay, because nearly all workers are affected by the same problems. So they don't buy the capitalist lie that wage rises cause inflation.

The capitalist class will try to regain control of the story. In the NHS struggle, the government wants deaths to pin on striking workers. They'll scour the hospitals to find examples of tragic scandals for media exposure and will ignore their own role in shortages of staff and equipment.

But they have a problem. Senior managers are working hard with ambulance union members, for instance, to prevent those cases happening. And people oppose the government's hard stance because they know from experience that any minimum service levels imposed will show that the ambulance service *before* the strike were way below any possible minimums. The same goes for other areas in dispute.

Our enemy works hard to restrict our opportunities to assert or gain control. Legal limits on the ability of trade unions to wage battles are already making it hard. Ballots for action must be postal and renewed every six months.

And any balloting errors mean the whole exercise will be ruled illegal, as the postal workers found. The government is planning further obstacles, like legal minimum service requirements which could see workers sacked or even taken to court for striking. Employers would get the power to decide which individual workers are essential and prevented from striking.

Keeping control of the action is essential. Decisions to advance the fight need to be coupled with decisions about when to

'Calls for a general strike or a Labour government are a blind alley, the opposite of control...'

retreat, how to preserve your organisation to fight another day, what you will define as a win, realising that today's win is temporary.

Building your forces is the real gain: you'll meet the same issues again next year, and the gain is that you'll be ready. Fighting is wearying – regroup to fight again.

Blind alleys

Calls for a general strike or for a Labour government to unseat the evil Tories are blind alleys. They are an illusion, the opposite of taking control. Workers are nowhere near ready to seize power from government – a general strike would lead to defeat and demoralisation.

Why should we vote for a political party that promises to make things better for us? And our experience of Labour governments is that they can't be relied on and will back the employer. We should devote our energy to develop our own organisations. We must rely on our own strengths to take control.

What about Brexit? Wasn't that about control – asserting Britain's sovereign right to decide its laws, control its borders, its currency, and shrug off the European Union's ever-tightening dictatorship? Yes, but having won the vote, we then foolishly relied on our capitalist government to implement what we had fought for.

Control in practice is not just about the big fights in the headlines. It's as much about the way those fights are conducted and what happens next – and all the other ways that workers act together. ■

This article is based on a speech at a CPBML public meeting in London last March.

March and April saw civil servants in struggle across the country, while junior doctors stepped up their pay fight...

Pay fights across Britain



Clockwise from top left: Striking civil servants, members of the PCS picketing outside the British Library, London, 4 April; PCS members outside the British Museum, London, 6 April; Junior doctors outside Bradford Royal Infirmary, 15 March; Junior doctors at St Thomas's Hospital, London, 12 April; More junior doctors, forming a long picket outside the Royal Sussex County Hospital, Brighton, on 14 March. All photos Workers.





A report from the TUC and transport unions calls for a major public transport outside of London – rail, tram and bus...

Britain needs better transport

TRANSPORT IS THE glue that holds the country together. It is essential for most workers get to their workplaces and to access vital services like health and education. And we need transport for food and other shopping, to go on holiday, or to take part in cultural or leisure activities.

It is also the means by which many goods and services reach our homes – whether online shopping deliveries or social services. And goods must be transported from where they are manufactured to where they are needed.

The government's current approach to transport lacks joined up thinking or any sense of an effective plan or strategy. Decisions on both investment and cutbacks appear almost random. Typically, the Budget in March made no mention of transport apart from an unrealistically small sum to fix potholes!

The government seems to favour private cars over public transport, no doubt driven by its dislike of the strong unionisation of public transport workforces, and its slavish devotion to individualism.

But its overriding approach is to restrict people's freedom of movement rather than improving it. That leads to cuts in rail and road infrastructure investment, reductions in subsidies for bus and train services. It encourages local authorities to implement measures such as low traffic neighbourhoods, congestion zones and low emission zones.

The government has allies in that aim. One element of the so-called "green movement" applauds restriction of movement in the name of protecting the environment. That's no more than an anti-working class and anti-industry world view that seeks a return to the living standards of pre-industrial times on the grounds that a "climate emergency" exists.

The TUC and most trade unions effectively support such notions when they accept arbitrary net-zero targets for carbon emission reduction. They ignore the enormous damage this dogmatic approach would have on workers – it won't be the rich and powerful that will suffer.

The TUC along with transport unions Aslef, RMT, TSSA and Unite launched a new report on 12 April entitled *Public transport*



Workers

The Elizabeth Line, London on its opening day, May 2022: it has been used for well over 100 million

fit for the climate emergency. It called for a huge increase in investment and financial support for public transport outside London – rail, tram and bus – which would if implemented provide around 870,000 new jobs.

Climate?

The report predictably justifies a massive shift away from car use and towards affordable public transport on the basis of a "climate emergency". It largely ignores the many other good reasons for doing so.

Much of the report makes good sense. The problem is that the almost exclusive focus on carbon emissions will distort decision making and lead to restricted rather than improved transport.

Around 75 per cent of British households have a car. But that still leaves around 17 million people reliant on public transport – particularly buses. And many people in households with a car are reliant on public transport – especially young adults increasingly forced by rocketing housing costs to live with parents.

Undoubtedly many value the flexibility and convenience afforded by car ownership, even though cars are ever more expensive to buy and run. And as public transport services are cut, more people will be forced to find the money for a car and those with cars will use them more often.

While it is desirable to reduce road traffic, excessive and disproportionate

Massive increase in investment and financial support for transport – much better



Million journeys since opening in May 2022.

restrictions – especially ahead of public transport improvements – are likely to meet huge opposition. People need viable, safe and affordable public transport alternatives.

The benefits are clear. Public transport is much safer, it is less polluting, uses much less energy, and it is far more efficient at moving large numbers of people.

We tolerate around 1,500 deaths and 26,000 serious injuries every year on Britain's roads. Fatalities and serious injuries caused by road accidents have fallen considerably as both vehicle and road design have improved.

Further reductions in road accidents could be achieved by even better design, improved road and vehicle management, as

well as more rigorous driver training, standards and enforcement. But the most effective way of doing so is to reduce road vehicle use through enhancing public transport provision.

The government announced on 15 April that it is scrapping all new smart motorways, but that is about saving £1 billion, not improving safety.

Many rightly regard smart motorways as dangerous because the lack of a permanent hard shoulder gives no refuge for broken-down vehicles, but other features of smart motorways can enhance safety. And there's no reason why a smart motorway can't also have a hard shoulder.

Fewer road accidents and injuries would directly benefit the NHS and emergency services. Fewer people would be away from work or school. And not least, many thousands of people would not have their lives devastated after a loved one had been killed or seriously injured.

Around a third of road accidents involve people actually at work – driving or travelling in the course of their employment. Employers have only begun to take their responsibility for managing road safety seriously in the last decade. Significant reductions in accidents have been achieved by some, although far too many ignore road risks. Workers are seen by capitalism, successive governments and many employers as expendable.

In contrast, deaths and serious injuries involving users of public transport are tiny. A death on the railways is so rare that it is usually headline news. Accidents involving bus users are also very rare.

Resources

There are nearly 33 million cars on the road in Britain, along with around 5 million vans and heavy goods vehicles. That's nearly 6 vehicles for every 10 people. Road vehicles are considerably less fuel-efficient than buses, trams and trains. And cars in particular are not a good use of resources.

Around 60 per cent of car journeys are made with just one occupant. As the TUC report notes, "public transport offers the best opportunity to reduce the distance travelled by cars (and lorries). A fully loaded bus can take 65 cars off the road. A full light

'Public transport is much safer, less polluting, uses less energy, and is far more efficient...'

rail/tram can take 90–150 cars off the road... One passenger train can take 500 cars off the road. One freight train can take 76 lorries off the road."

According to the RAC Foundation's figures, the average car is underutilised, being driven for only about 4 per cent of the time. Otherwise it is parked – at home or elsewhere.

Emissions

Air pollution from road vehicles has fallen dramatically as vehicle emissions have been brought down by better engine designs.

Road vehicles emit around 70 per cent of all transport CO2 emissions, but that's not the whole story. The TUC report is fixated on CO2 emissions, but cars and lorries are also responsible for many other airborne pollutants. These include half of all nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide, and a quarter of all hydrocarbons. These pollutants increase respiratory ailments like asthma and bronchitis, heighten the risk of cancers, and so burden health and social services.

Airborne particulate matter from rubber tyres and brakes is thought to be responsible for thousands of premature deaths. A new report by Imperial College estimated that in Greater London alone over 3,500 deaths in 2019 were due to NO2 and airborne particulates. But this type of pollution would not be wholly overcome by using electric propulsion instead of petrol and diesel engines.

Many fewer road vehicles would mean much less pollution. Trains in particular have the capability to easily run on electricity generated by low polluting sources such as

Continued on page 16



Continued from page 15

nuclear, wind and hydro. Urban buses can also easily use electricity – and modern trolleybuses can operate from overhead wires and then run many miles using batteries.

Electrically-powered public transport uses proven technology. The infrastructure investment would be significant, but achievable. Its expansion does not rely on exaggerated claims like those made for electric cars – that would need vast investment in electricity distribution and undoubtedly lead to scrapping perfectly usable vehicles to force change through.

With road traffic well past pre-pandemic levels and growing, congestion is getting worse, even in rural areas, exacerbating pollution problems.

Britain is the world's 10th most congested country and London is Europe's second most gridlocked city after Moscow. According to one traffic data firm, British drivers wasted on average 31 hours each in rush-hour traffic in 2017.

Continuing growth in road traffic will also lead to gridlock for much of the day in even more urban areas, and in many rural ones too. Experience has shown that the large

scale construction of expensive and environmentally damaging new roads does not in the main solve congestion: it merely induces more traffic and yet more congestion – whatever the type of propulsion.

In contrast, public transport alternatives of the sort argued for by the TUC report can much more easily cope with increased demand induced by improvements. That's happening for example with London's new Elizabeth Line (Crossrail).

But the answer to congestion is not restriction. People move around for a purpose, working and living their lives. The TUC report misses the point when it says, "We suggest that the best way to constrain traffic...is to introduce a national system of road user charging".

That would mean that freedom to use a car when and where the driver wishes would be constrained. Signs of that appear in plans for "low traffic neighbourhoods" and congestion charge and other road management schemes. A failure to radically improve public transport provision will make road charging and other restrictions a near certainty.

Benefits

According to the TUC report "moving more freight to rail would generate enormous benefits, including carbon reduction, reduced congestion, improved road safety, better road maintenance and wider economic and employment benefits.

"Currently rail freight generates economic benefits worth £2.45 billion annually, including benefits to customers, reduced congestion, reduced carbon and improved safety. A large proportion of these

benefits accrue to communities in former industrial heartlands."

Just as there will be a continuing need for cars, there will be a continuing need for freight vehicles on Britain's roads, from large heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) to the ubiquitous white van. Goods will still need to be transported from railheads to their final destinations; the key point is to reduce the number of goods vehicles needed. The opportunities for greatly increased rail capacity that HS2 would have provided are now being squandered.

The headline costs of rail infrastructure investment are high, but that is true of roads too. And the full cost of road freight is not taken into account in such comparisons.

Research carried out for the Campaign for Better Transport in 2016 stated that "HGVs meet less than a third of the costs they impose on society. HGVs are up to 160,000 times more damaging to roads than cars, five times more likely than cars to be involved in fatal accidents on local roads and pay nothing for their contributions to air pollution."

Millions of people have mobility difficulties or conditions that prevent them from driving. Improved public transport is crucial for them to better access education, employment and leisure opportunities.

Better and more affordable public transport services would improve people's daily lives in the same way that better education, health care and social services would do. Like these other services, public transport should not be about making profits – such services should be run for the collective good. ■



CPBML public meeting

Thursday 22 June , 7.30 pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 4RL

"Who should run London?"

London was once "the flower of cities all' and a centre of working class organisation. Now that control has been usurped. How shall we take it back? Come and discuss. All welcome.

CPBML MAY DAY MEETINGS 2023

WORKERS! TAKE CHARGE OF BRITAIN!

Celebrate International Workers' Day 2023 at the CPBML's May Day meetings.

Workers of all lands, unite!

On May Day we take stock of Britain and the world. In the past year, many British workers have joined battle with the employers, showing discipline, unity and tactical ingenuity. The class as a whole is strengthened. How, then, to move forward?

In the world, war and the threat of war gather pace as the various imperialisms re-arm. Now Britain is out of the EU, the fight to leave NATO, the US and EU's military wing, must be taken forward.

The meetings will be the launch of a new document from the party, the Foundations of the CPBML, setting out what we stand for in 2023.

**Workers of all lands, unite!
Fight for independence!**



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Separatism takes different forms across Britain, a reaction for unity will have to be persistent and strategic...

Britain is one nation – no



Workers

Opponents of separatism demonstrate in Oban in June 2019 against a rally by separatists. Note the way the separatists have merged the saltire with the EU flag.

THE COLLAPSE of Sturgeon's leadership has brought joy in a way that many have compared with that felt at Thatcher's resignation so many years ago. But whatever happens in Scotland, and across Britain, national unity has many enemies, and we cannot afford to neglect it. Above all, having won independence from the EU, it would be terrible to lose it again.

What is a nation? It's difficult to improve on Stalin's definition: a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture. Britain ticks all of those boxes. Further, Britain is not a federation, not an empire, not a commonwealth.

One reason why the first industrial revo-

lution happened in Britain was our national unity. The union with Wales was brought about in the 1530s; union with Scotland through, first, the union of the two crowns in 1603, and then the Act of Union in 1707.

Integrated

A lot happened between those two dates as the nation emerged from an absolute monarchy backed by the Church – the revolution of the 1640s, the execution of Charles I, the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The power of the monarchy was tamed and the scene set for Britain to develop as an integrated industrial nation.

But if capitalism in its youth needed national unity, its later form, imperialism, has shown itself a force for disunity, partition and separatism. Consider Vietnam, Korea, the

break-up of Yugoslavia.

The EU encouraged separatism and a diminished role for nation states – and was rewarded by those it sponsored with an almost obsessive commitment to continued EU membership while we were part of it, and to re-joining once we had left.

Yet it may seem puzzling that people who want independence “from Westminster” are so keen to surrender that independence to a foreign super-state. Logic seems to play little part in the counsels of Plaid Cymru or the Scottish National Party, but they share a fear and hatred of Britain as a nation and its people.

In Scotland, Sturgeon has gone, and the separatist forces are still in disarray, despite the election of a new leader, Humza Yousaf. Sturgeon left as the working class went into

ary movement backed only by a minority. The struggle to all separatism!

struggle: the woeful record of the SNP administration – record waiting times in the NHS, falling life expectancy, the highest rate of drug deaths in Europe, the collapse of public transport and policing, crisis in education – all contributed.

The final straw was the SNP's embrace of multiple "genders" and self-identification. Yousaf is directly responsible for at least some of that – and the lethal Hate Crime Act, designed to create more hate and more crime.

It's not enough to observe the troubles of the SNP with pleasure. National unity and independence for the whole nation won't be safeguarded by watching events from the sidelines, but require the working class to take the field.

Federalism

In Wales, Mark Drakeford, Labour First Minister, has called for "far-reaching federalism". An Independent Commission on the constitution published an interim report last December. The independence of this commission is questionable, packed as it is with separatists and the usual professional committee-sitters.

This bias is evident in rejection of the possibility that Wales might remain solidly in the union, or that devolution could be rescinded. That's despite 15 to 20 per cent of respondents to their consultation taking that view.

Instead they see only three futures: entrenched devolution, federalism, or independence. They include statements about what they call "strains on representative democracy". By this they mean when the workers have ideas of their own and won't vote as told by their self-appointed betters.

It seems, they say, that the current arrangements rely "too heavily on indirect mechanisms for the public to influence policy eg by voting for parties based on their manifestos, and holding government to account through the ballot box".

And England is not immune, with the discredited and rejected ideas of regional assemblies, elected city mayors on the American model, and ever-proliferating quangos such as development agencies, which both Conservatives and Labour want to revive.

The government's 2022 Levelling Up white paper promised that every part of England would get "London style" powers and an elected mayor if they wished – which means "whether you like it or not".

This policy is proposed under the banner of empowering local leaders but there is no demand for it from workers, only from politicians keen to further their own interests.

Whoever asked for police commissioners for example? Small towns which once had a police station now instead have a desk in the local council offices, staffed part-time. Even the county towns, where the county police force has their headquarters, have the same level of service.

This period before the next general election is a good time to drag the devolution discussion into the open. We might say Labour is no better – in truth it is more dangerous. The party promises "massive devolution", which no one ever asked for.

A charitable take on Labour's *A New Britain: Renewing our Democracy and Rebuilding our Economy*, published last December, would be that it's a report spectacularly missing the point. But in reality it deliberately seeks to set district against district, region against region, worker against worker.

The report proposes to replace the House of Lords with an Assembly of the Nations and Regions. Rather than rolling back devolution, it proposes new powers for the Scottish and Welsh assemblies. It proclaims that "devolved self-government should be permanent, expansive..." – but forgot to add "expensive".

Double devo?

The report calls for "double devolution", cutting 50,000 civil service jobs in London and moving at least 12 government agencies out of the capital. Workers have always been suspicious of government reorganisation, under whatever name it appears. Promises of greater efficiency and money saving never materialise.

The document also proposes, somewhat at odds with Labour's record in national and local government, to root out criminal behaviour in British politics.

If we want an independent future as a sovereign nation, none of the parliamentary

'If we want an independent future as a sovereign nation, none of the Westminster parties will do it. We must do it ourselves.'

parties at Westminster or elsewhere will do – indeed they are the problem. So we must do it ourselves.

Unity

The current level of struggle highlights the value of national unity, not just against government intransigence, but against employer fragmentation. Rail trade unions have overcome the imposed fragmentation of their industry and turned it to advantage.

New tactical thinking has been evident in recent pay struggles with a guerrilla approach, fighting on ground of our choosing, where we are strong and the class enemy is weak.

NHS workers in Wales and Scotland have separate pay settlements from NHS England. But they have been successful because their pay structures are closely linked to those in England and trade unions have been able to take a coherent national approach to separate employers.

Such strategic success does not come easily. The success of the "North East says No" campaign against regional devolution back in 2004 was a resounding triumph, only achieved on the back of a hard-fought, protracted struggle.

People's resentment or opposition towards devolution will not move mountains unless it is galvanised. Voting in a parliamentary election will take us nowhere: all the parliamentary parties are in favour of devolution. Workers will need to set up their own new organisations to fight this most insidious threat to our unity as workers and as a nation. ■

This book describes how modern, transnational capitalism has eroded the interests of workers everywhere, out of reach of national governments.

Meet the new capitalists

Shiny Things, via Wikimedia Commons



World Bank headquarters, Washington DC – dominated by the new capitalists.

The capitalists of the 21st century: an easy-to-understand outline of the new financial players, Werner Rügemer, paperback, 308 pages, ISBN 978-374971162-8, Tredition, 2022, £14.99. Kindle and eBook editions available.

IN THIS EXCELLENT book Werner Rügemer presents the new financial bodies which the 1983 Thatcher Big Bang let rip. Large capital organisers, private equity funds, hedge funds, venture capitalists, and private investment banks have become far more powerful than traditional, more regulated banks. They organise worldwide selling, buying and restructuring of banks, companies and public enterprises. They exploit existing value; they do not create new value.

They dominate governments and the international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the City of London. They lower

wages and increase private gains. They collude with law firms, rating and PR agencies, management consultants and central banks. They believe in a borderless world. They pay no heed to the economies and needs of nations.

US companies dominate, but Britain is also a key base. Of the 100 most valuable companies of Western capitalism in 2017, 52 were from the USA, headed by the tech sector. Six companies were from Britain.

London

Of the 50 largest private equity investors, 31 were based in the USA, eight in London, two in Canada, two in China, and one each in seven other countries.

Of the largest dozen hedge funds in 2016, ten were based in the USA, two in London. Almost 70 per cent of all such funds are domiciled in the Cayman Islands. This British Overseas Territory is a tax haven ranked second only to the British

Virgin Islands, living on fees from the transnational capitalist class.

One of the main roles of private equity companies is hiding the capital of hundreds of thousands of wealthy clients in secretive tax havens, out of the reach of national governments.

Rügemer points out that of all the world's capitalist countries, none is as much under foreign ownership as Britain. The US investment company BlackRock is one of the three investors with the highest ownership of the 100 most important British companies in the FTSE index.

BlackRock is the world's largest shadow bank, co-owner of over 17,000 companies worldwide. It has hundreds of billions of dollars at its disposal, topped up by bank loans when a company is purchased. So far it has asset-stripped several hundred companies.

Impoverishment

In the 1980s, the new financial players accelerated the de-industrialisation of the USA, causing impoverishment of the US working class and enrichment of the capitalist class. Since 2000, they have been doing the same in the EU. They attack trade unions and limits on working hours. They attack compulsory social insurance, protections against dismissal, and collective agreements.

Since its inception in 1958, the European Commission's highly paid, lightly taxed and legally privileged bureaucracy has aided the dismantling of trade union rights, most recently through the so-called European Pillar of Social Rights. It upholds the interests of private companies in the EU and worldwide.

Acting for the European Commission, BlackRock organised the stress test for the 39 largest banks in the EU, many of which it co-owns. It also prepared the risk analyses for bank bailouts in Ireland, Greece, Britain and Cyprus.

Mario Draghi, ECB president from 2011 to 2019 and later appointed prime minister of Italy from February 2021 to October 2022, re-modelled the ECB on the US central bank, the Federal Reserve, and aided US banks and investors to gain access to the European market.

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'They believe in a borderless world. They pay no heed to the economies and needs of nations...'

In 2017 BlackRock hired ex-Chancellor George Osborne, who had pushed through the "pensions revolution" in Britain, allowing early access to pension savings and freedom to choose financial products promoted by BlackRock and similar firms.

On behalf of the European Commission, Osborne pushed through the Pan European Personal Pension Product. Employees in the other EU member states were also supposed to buy the financial products called ishares (collections of Exchange-Traded Funds) for private retirement provision managed by BlackRock, with no payment guarantee.

Rügemer ends with five chapters on what he calls "the communist-led capitalism in the People's Republic of China". He argues that, "The state has gradually replaced the centrally planned economy with a mixed but regulated economy... a fair number of foreign investments are channelled through the financial havens of the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Ireland and the Cayman Islands. China has adopted other Western instruments in form: venture capital financing, private equity funds and public-private partnerships."

By 2015, Rügemer writes, China ranked third in terms of the volume of foreign investment, behind the USA and Britain. Over 20,000 Chinese companies are owners, or joint owners, of foreign companies across 140 countries.

The right to strike was cut from the Chinese constitution in 1982. A state founded as a dictatorship of the proletariat now forbids the working class to act in its own interest. ■

WORKERS

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JOURNAL OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY ✱

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TAKE CONTROL: BUILD THE NEW BRITAIN

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Only the ruling class benefited from slavery. During the long struggle to abolish it over 1.5 million of Britain's 12 million people signed petitions.

Slavery, banks and empire

BETWEEN 1660 and 1807, British-owned ships carried 3.5 million Africans across the Atlantic, more than any other country. British property owners were the world's chief slavers, owning the slave ships, the slaves and the plantations. British workers did not control their own labour power, never mind own other people. Black chattel slavery and white wage slavery were parts of the same system.

Only the seriously wealthy could afford to engage in the lucrative practice of slave trading. Raising capital for the voyages stimulated the growth of the banking industry, and slave trading merchants established many of Britain's first banks.

Rotten roots

Insurance and banking firms financed plantations and speculated on slave trade voyages. Bankers in particular gained from the trade: banking was almost wholly financed on the profits from the slave trade – the rotten roots of today's finance capital.

The historian Padraic Scanlan wrote, "The profits of slavery pushed European empires into war while also intensifying inter-imperial and inter-colonial trade and exchange. ... Slavery made the Caribbean profitable; profits provoked wars, wars ended in conquest; conquest led to new plantations and more slavery."

Slavery helped to ruin West Africa. "The combination of failing manufacturing industries, depopulation, more frequent war and massive inflation crippled many West African economies. The economic crisis caused by the slave trade made slave trading central to many economies."

In his famous book *Capitalism and Slavery* Eric Williams, later the first prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, argued

'Profits from the slave trade were only a tiny contribution to capital formation...'

that the profits from the slave trade "provided one of the main streams of accumulation of capital in England which financed the Industrial Revolution".

Slavery wreaked havoc across the world. But Williams was wrong. The profits from the slave trade – even if they had all gone towards industrialisation – were only a tiny contribution to capital formation. And much of those profits added to the private wealth of individuals who generally chose conspicuous consumption like building and furnishing country houses rather than investing in the industrialisation of Britain.

Popular

The struggle to abolish slavery in the British Empire was a hugely popular movement, but long and bitter. Between 1787 and 1792, 1.5 million Britons, out of a 12 million population, signed petitions against the slave trade.

But Parliament had a powerful pro-slavery lobby supported by prominent politicians such as Robert Peel and George Canning who both later served as prime minister. Between 1793 and 1804, abolitionism made little progress because the ruling class's war against revolutionary France pushed aside all reform causes.

But by 1807 Napoleon's blockade on British shipping helped to persuade politicians that it would be patriotic to oppose France by cutting off its supply of slaves. Abolition of the trade could be sold as part of the war effort!

An Act of Parliament to abolish the British slave trade was passed in 1807, but it did not end the practice of slavery. The pro-slavery lobby in Parliament remained strong. Only after the Reform Act of 1832, when 16 of their 35 MPs lost their seats, did the lobby lose its influence.

The 1831-32 slave rebellion in Jamaica helped to convince a wavering Parliament to pass the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act. The government compensated not the slaves but the slave-owners. And who paid? Nine future generations of British taxpayers and nine generations of the descendants of the enslaved within the empire, also taxpayers to the British Exchequer. It was finally paid off in 2015.

The government relied on banks to



Wellcome Collection public domain

Capture of the slave ship *Emilia* off the coast of Cuba

supply the money for compensating the slave-owners. In 1835 the Rothschilds bank bought £15 million in British government bonds which earned hundreds of millions in interest for 180 years, financed by British taxpayers. Lloyds Bank, Barclays Bank, the Royal Bank of Scotland, Baring Brothers, and at least 30 others all received slave-owner compensation.

British slave-owners directed their reparation money into new colonial pursuits around the world. They invested in slave regimes in the American South, Brazil and Cuba, in railway stocks in South America and the USA, in shipping lines across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and in Caribbean sugar production.

Others invested in plantations across Africa and Asia. Very little went into financing Britain's Industrial Revolution.

Demands

The 1814-15 Congress of Vienna divided up power in Europe after Napoleon's defeat. Anti-slavery campaigners conducted unprecedented waves of petitions – collecting well over a million signatures – demanding that the government supported the universal end of slave trading at the Congress.

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ba by the Royal Navy ships *Styx* and *Jasper*, 1858.

The Royal Navy came out of the Congress with the power to police international waters, enabling it to play a key role in ending the wicked trade.

A permanent anti-slavery patrol operated on the West African coast from 1819 to 1859, trying to patrol 3,000 miles of Africa's coastline. The Navy captured over 500 slave ships between 1819 and 1849, freeing at least 104,034 slaves between 1807 and 1839.

This must be set against the estimated 1,908,600 slaves taken from Africa between 1811 and 1839. The naval campaign was never going to stop the trade as long as open markets existed in the Americas.

The courage and sacrifice of the Royal Navy's cruisers achieved the initial aim of destroying the British slave trade, ended slaving by the Netherlands, made the slave trade much more difficult and expensive for those engaged in it, and encouraged the abolition movements in the slaving nations.

But the end of slavery did not mean the end of forced labour or colonial rule. Caribbean former slaves were forced to work with little or no compensation for up to fourteen years as "apprentices" before they could finally gain freedom. ■

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Worried about the future of
Britain? Join the CPBML.

ABOUT US

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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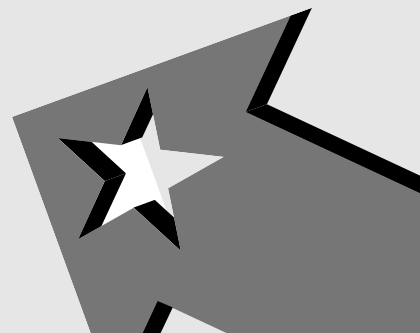
78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB

email info@cpbml.org.uk

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

www.cpbml.org.uk

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Oppose all free trade agreements

‘These free trade agreements are about far more than smoothing trade – they are about protecting capitalist investment and the right of capital to move freely...’

FOR BRITAIN to leave the EU and then seek to join other trade blocs is the opposite of asserting independence and sovereignty. Free trade agreements might sound good, but they are bad for workers and national economies.

On 31 March the government concluded negotiations for Britain’s accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). As far as Downing Street and the 11 existing members of bloc are concerned, it’s a done deal.

The government claims that joining a bloc which accounts for about 13 per cent of world GDP can be nothing but good for our economy and that growth and prosperity will follow. By this it means integrating economic activity in Britain even more tightly with global capitalism.

The Partnership is not about building industry, manufacturing and services here to meet the needs of British workers. Nor even primarily about the import and export of goods. These free trade agreements, and there are many in existence and proposed, are about far more than smoothing trade – they are about protecting capitalist investment and the right of capital to move freely.

Free trade and war go together too. Britain’s latest and most extensive free trade agreement post-Brexit followed on the agreement of a defence pact with Japan, signed in January. In the background, barely concealed, is the wish to limit and contain China – seen as a trade rival – and to support Taiwan.

Free trade agreements are negotiated in secret, away from anyone who might object or ask questions – like the working class in signatory countries.

These agreements always cede control over trade policy and protection for domestic industry. Transnational groups can pursue national governments in secret courts against perceived threats to their profits and rights to free trade.

British workers have been here before. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership treaty (TTIP) was proposed in 2010 between the EU and the USA. It followed the same pattern – promoted on claims of the benefits of free trade,

secret negotiations and hidden processes outside national control.

There was a huge opposition to TTIP from workers in Britain and other EU member states. In Britain trade unions and other groups joined demonstrations and campaigned against joining TTIP through 2014 and into 2015.

There was public debate about the threat to British industry, as well as to public services like education and the NHS. And the dispute resolution process was seen as totally loaded towards international companies.

TTIP was finally killed off by President Donald Trump in 2018. But by then Britain had delivered a bigger blow to the EU, by voting to leave in June 2016.

In the long, frustrating period where successive governments and EU cheerleaders tried to undermine or ignore the vote to leave the EU, there was much talk of trade and the need to continue to do business with EU member states. But among workers, how Britain should trade with nations took second place to the main task – forcing the government to act and to free the country from the EU.

Britain is again, after 50 years, able to negotiate trade deals directly with other nations. There is no need to replicate the EU’s trade policy and every reason to look critically at attempts to join trade blocs like the CPTPP.

Some Leave supporters try to draw a distinction between the CPTPP and being a member of the EU, on the grounds that the Pacific trade bloc has no ambition to be a superstate. That ignores the fundamental nature of both blocs – the preservation of capitalism and the suppression of workers.

The TUC, though, has not forgotten the risks from transnational agreements. It questioned the benefits of joining the CPTPP when negotiations began in 2021, and opposes the government’s decision to join.

The fight for Britain’s independence is not yet won. Staying clear of transnational trade blocs, opposing ratification of the CPTPP and a return to the relative clarity of the campaign against TTIP would be a start. The arguments are the same, in or out of the EU. ■

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