

# WORKERS

WWW.CPBML.ORG.UK

MAY/JUNE 2018 £1



## FIGHTING FOR A FUTURE

**Unis** Truce in pensions war

**Food** Brexit opportunity

**Skill** Develop it here

**War** Stop EU militarism!

**Nuclear** Small can be good

**Windrush** Discrimination

**NHS** New pay offer

**Rail** Whitehall farce

**Syria** Hands off!

*plus* News,

**Book Reviews**

**and more**

# WORKERS



## The disadvantage of being British

THE VICIOUS treatment of the Windrush Britons – who arrived from the Caribbean as children from 1948 to 1971 – contrasts starkly with the position of EU nationals under the Brexit transition agreement. It shines a light on how so-called “free movement” has operated to discriminate against British people (whether of Commonwealth origin or not).

To focus on alleged bureaucratic bungling is to miss the point. The machinery of government can be efficient when it wants to be. At heart the problem is that no government – not for decades – has grasped why the British people think it ought to have a migration policy that favours British workers.

In fact, this government and its predecessors have wanted to move in the opposite direction.

Ever since Britain accepted the EU concept of free movement, EU nationals have been able to bring in children, spouses, and the children of spouses, from anywhere in the world without having to meet all the thresholds that are required of UK citizens.

Now, with the transition agreement, they have further rights. In particular (Article 10), EU nationals resident in Britain before the end of the transition period will retain the right of permanent residence even if they have been absent from Britain for a period of more than five years.

Yet the Windrush Britons were told that any absence from the UK since 1988 lasting more than

two years would disqualify them from residence. One, Junior Green, was told in 2009 by the Home Office that to update his passport he had to prove he had lived here for each of the previous 10 years.

EU nationals seeking permanent residence in Britain are guaranteed a form that is “short, simple, user friendly”. The NTL (No Time Limit) form that was required of Windrush Britons is 21 pages long, with an additional seven pages of guidance.

For EU nationals, the transition agreement says that the UK “shall ensure that administrative procedures for applications are smooth, transparent and simple and that any unnecessary administrative burdens are avoided”. Contrast that with the obstacle course that was placed in the path of the Windrush Britons before the tsunami of public outrage forced a change of policy.

And then there’s the cost. The NTL application cost £229 for a single person and £229 for each dependent. Plus a Biometric Residence Permit at £19.20 per person. An EU national applying for settled status will pay “no more than the cost charged to British citizens for a UK passport” – £85.

What’s wrong about all this? Just about everything. The casual disregard for basic humanity shown by successive governments – Labour, Coalition and Conservative – is a disgrace.

Brexit is our chance to plan an immigration policy that doesn’t discriminate against British citizens – or favour citizens of EU states. ■



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

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

[www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk) @cpbml  
Issue 206, May/June 2018



## Contents – May/June 2018

### News Digest

Fishing boats “transition” protest, p3; Truce in university pensions fight, p4; Staff mull health pay offer, p5

03

### Features

Skills and education for the future of Britain, p6; The brightest and the best?, p8; Nuclear reactors – small can be beautiful, p9; Stop the EU war machine!, p10; We can make food safer: the responsibility is ours, p14; Outsourcing: the vultures gather, p16; Foreign firms line up to plunder rail, p18

06

### End Notes

Book reviews: Populism and Reaction, p20; Engineering’s decline, p21; Historic Notes: British trade unions – early origins, p22

20



<b>FISHING</b>	Boats 'transition' protest
<b>HEALTH</b>	Avoidable deaths
<b>ENGINEERING</b>	Year-long campaign
<b>UNIVERSITIES</b>	Truce in pensions fight
<b>APPRENTICES</b>	Poor match
<b>NHS</b>	Staff consider offer
<b>DEBT</b>	Record high
<b>E-NEWSLETTER</b>	How to subscribe
<b>ON THE WEB</b>	More news online
<b>WHAT'S ON</b>	Coming soon

Workers



**20 fishing boats had been expected at Hastings, but boats from Rye, Newhaven, Dungeness and Eastbourne boosted the number to 30.**

## Boats 'transition' protest

FISHERMEN BROUGHT about 200 fishing vessels to six ports around the coast on Sunday 8 April to stage mass demonstrations against the government's "transition" arrangements allowing the EU to control British waters until 2020. Crowds gathered on the shores to join the protest.

In Whitstable a fishing boat was symbolically burnt to demonstrate the likely fate of what remains of the British fishing fleet after 40 years of EU plunder of our waters. During the "transition" the EU will have control and power to impose even smaller quotas on British fishermen.

Fishing for Leave, which organised the demonstrations, pointed out that 60 per cent of the British fishing fleet has been deliberately scrapped under government programmes while other EU countries have built boats with EU grants to fish our waters.

Other armadas formed in Hastings, Milford Haven, Plymouth, Portsmouth and Newcastle. In Hastings local fishermen's relatives, standing ashore, said the prospects for their survival in the industry are poor. Politicians including Theresa May and Amber Rudd the local MP have broken their promises about fishing and will likely betray again in the final deal they strike with the EU.

Instead, fishermen want a no-deal departure from the EU. That could save the industry if we asserted our own control of British waters, conserving the fish by a "days at sea" limit on fishing.

"This is only the start of resisting the sell out of fishing and indeed the whole Brexit vote," said Fishing for Leave. "Sunday's collaboration, and the vast showing of public support, shows how much fishing and the requisition of our nations water's means to coastal communities."

## HEALTH

### Avoidable deaths

ACROSS BRITAIN an average of 229 avoidable deaths was recorded for every 100,000 people between 2014 and 2016 – a total of around 138,000 people a year, the Office for National Statistics has reported.

Apart from accidents, suicides and murders, deaths are considered avoidable if they could have been prevented through effective and timely healthcare, by public health interventions, or by a combination of both. They include deaths from various types of cancer, heart disease, alcohol, drugs, and childbirth complications. ■

## ENGINEERING

### Year-long campaign

THE GOVERNMENT has declared 2018 to be the year of engineering, a year-long campaign to tackle the engineering skills gap and widen the pool of young people who join the profession. The idea is to increase awareness and understanding of what engineers do among young people aged 7-16, their parents and their teachers. If this is news to you, spread the word to teachers and schoolchildren who can access free materials.

London Transport Museum is celebrating the year of engineering with an exhibition looking forward to a facility yet to be opened – the Crossrail project, to be known as The Elizabeth Line. It will provide London with a new east-west rail service. The exhibition is titled *The Secret Life of a Mega Project*. ■

• A longer version of this article is on the web at [www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk).

**If you have news from your industry, trade or profession call us on 020 8801 9543 or email [workers@cpbml.org.uk](mailto:workers@cpbml.org.uk)**





## ON THE WEB

A selection of additional stories at [cpbml.org.uk](http://cpbml.org.uk)...

### Call this a transition?

The much-heralded Brexit “transition” agreement has delayed our departure from the European Union – and left us in the position of a vassal state.

### Industrial action sweeps across France

France is in uproar over President Macron’s government’s anti-working class policies.

### US private equity muscled in on rail

An American private equity firm is bidding for one of Britain’s largest bus and rail companies, First Group.

### Strike hits North Sea oil platform

Workers on the Mariner platform in the North Sea went on strike on Saturday 7 April over poor working conditions.

### ‘Strength in workplace’ matters most, admits Unite

While stoking fears about the impact of Brexit, Unite has acknowledged that protection comes from collective strength in the workplace.

### Corbyn's speech: cynical, disingenuous, reckless

Jeremy Corbyn’s Brexit speech in Coventry on 26 February would have been breathtakingly naïve had it not been so stunningly cynical.

### Plus: the e-newsletter

Visit [cpbml.org.uk](http://cpbml.org.uk) to sign up to your free regular copy of the CPBML’s electronic newsletter, delivered to your email inbox.

Julian Stallabrass (CC-BY-SA 2.0)



UCU members at the Courtauld Institute, London, putting their point over while on strike, 28 February.

## Truce in uni pensions fight

THE LONG-RUNNING dispute over pensions conducted by members of the University and College Union (UCU) has been suspended after they voted by 64 per cent to 36 per cent to accept the employers’ latest proposals. The political gains the University College Union workers have made so far in their brilliant response to the covert EU-led pension offensive have been tremendous.

Membership has soared, too, with some branches recording increases of 50 per cent – much needed in a sector where many workers have assumed that a union will always be there without feeling they need to make the effort to join. The employers in Universities UK (UUK) declared in late 2017 that they needed to close the Universities Superannuation Scheme pension guarantee to future service and to replace it with a stock market-related pension with no guarantees.

Following intense action by union members across Britain the UUK has now agreed that the scheme should continue with a future guaranteed pension promise.

But the offer leaves open a big question: Should the value of the current pension guarantee continue to accrue for future pensionable service, or should it be diluted?

To address this question the employers are proposing an “independent pension panel” to review how the scheme’s pension fund deficit has been arrived at.

That deficit has fluctuated over time from £12 billion to £6.1 billion. How come? Only by studying the machinations of the EU will University College Union workers be able to understand what has been happening to their pension, and what they have to do next.

The EU has prescribed the pension valuation method that must be used in all occupational pensions. In essence, it is disguised politics where the method is rigged to throw up a “shock and awe” deficit, so that workers capitulate and give up on a meaningful pension guarantee. Quite simply, the UCU must now demand that the EU, through the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority, take its hands off the University Superannuation Scheme. ■

• A longer version of this article is on the web at [www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk).

## APPRENTICESHIPS

### Poor match

THE HEAD of Ofsted, Amanda Spielman, made some telling points in her address to the Annual Apprenticeship Conference held in Birmingham on 22 March.

In an unusually blunt speech she highlighted the key issues her inspectors had found in their pilot inspections of apprenticeship providers since the new apprenticeship levy scheme began.

She identified underlying concerns that the new scheme was neither providing a good match to employers’ requirements nor those of young people leaving school for work.

For example, 40 per cent of newly approved apprenticeships were in the higher-end, degree-level categories while only 7 per cent of young people seeking apprenticeships were in that category. ■

• A longer version of this article is on the web at [www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk).

## DEBT

### Record high

GLOBAL DEBTS have risen to a new record high of £167 trillion, a rise of £21 trillion compared with 2016, according to the Institute of International Finance. Debts have risen particularly sharply in China, Argentina, Nigeria and Turkey. This has

happened during a period of modest growth internationally. There are concerns that the debt burden could bring serious risks to world finances when the downturn occurs.

Corporate debts are booming and there are fears (even at the IMF) that much of the extra lending is going to businesses at the riskier end of the spectrum. Early tremors of another financial crash? ■



Mark Thomas/Unison

London Ambulance picket during the last NHS pay fight, 2014.

## NHS staff consider pay offer

IT'S BAD ENOUGH that the NHS has been lagging behind inflation for seven years but take the rise in travel costs, accommodation and food into account and the gap between the pay "rise" and RPI becomes even starker. Even the employers are becoming increasingly concerned at the difficulties they face when trying to recruit and retain health workers.

Growing discontent with the so-called 1 per cent pay cap, even among a smattering of government MPs, has led to the current Framework pay offer, amounting to 6.5 per cent over three years for those at the top of their bands but bigger increases for the lowest paid.

With its many internal and somewhat technical restructurings the offer is deliberately obscure. And being spread over three years it will be harder to unravel. But some things are clear: first, nearly all the unions recommended the Framework agreement. Only the GMB continues to put its own poaching efforts above working class solidarity.

Second, the offer is considerably better than before negotiations began. Third, it is the first funded offer to break the pay cap – last year's Pay Review Board actually considered giving no pay award!

And fourth, there is agreement that the top of each pay band is the full rate for the job. This destroys Hunt's attempts to do away with pay increments. Over 85 per cent of current NHS staff will be at the top of their band by the end of the three year agreement, far more than now.

For the unions this means major pay increases for staff below the top band, meaningful increases for top-of-band staff, big improvements to starting salaries and an immediate move to a new above-living wage minimum rate, with further increases for the lowest paid staff by the end of the deal.

Health workers are being given a long time – until 5 June – to consider the offer, perhaps in recognition of its complexity. The ultimate question hasn't changed, though, and a rejection of the offer is only real if workers are prepared to undertake industrial action to move the employers.

To do this would require mobilising more than 50 per cent of staff, more than half a million workers, to vote, and for half of these to vote in favour of action. An alternative future is a reversion to fighting locally instead of just nationally over pay, but the consciousness and organisation necessary for such a move lies some way off. ■

## WHAT'S ON

### Coming soon

#### MAY

#### CPBML May Day Meetings



#### LONDON

Tuesday 1 May, 7.30pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,  
London WC1R 4RL

#### LEEDS

Tuesday 1 May, 7.30pm

Cosmopolitan Hotel, Lower Briggate,  
Leeds LS1 4AE

#### GLASGOW

Tuesday 1 May, 7pm

Renfield Conference Centre, 260  
Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4JP

"Take Control for an Independent  
Britain"

On the 50th anniversary of the  
founding of the CPBML, we invite  
you to celebrate with us the  
prospects for independence.



#### STAY INFORMED

• Keep up-to-date in between issues of **Workers** by subscribing to our free electronic newsletter. Just enter your email address at the foot of any page on our website, [cpbml.org.uk](http://cpbml.org.uk)



**One of the consequences of Brexit must be that employers to invest in training...**

# Skills and education for



Greg Epperson/shutterstock.com

**Apprentice using a router on a woodblock.**

FAR TOO many employers avoid training by importing workers from elsewhere. In fact, the TUC estimates that a third of British employers make no investment in training whatsoever. This is not sustainable inside or outside the EU, but outside there is an opportunity to make a change.

Employers have felt secure in the knowledge that they could rely on a ready supply of itinerant labour, both from the European Union and elsewhere. The Home Office visa

cap system for highly skilled non-EU migrants, introduced since the referendum vote, has attracted moans from employers. They would prefer to rely on people-trafficking rather than invest in their own workers.

The government's Industrial Strategy published in November 2017 included proposals that could go some way to changing this. It calls for "a technical education system that rivals the best in the world, to stand alongside our world-class higher education

system". To achieve this, investment is needed – "an additional £406 million in maths, digital and technical education, helping to address the shortage of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) skills" and "a new National Retraining Scheme that supports people to re-skill, beginning with a £64 million investment for digital and construction training".

The government strategy envisages establishing Institutes of Technology, funded to the tune of £170 million, to create this technical education system. But at the House of Lords economic committee in March both the Further Education Commissioner and Association of Colleges argued that the funding was "modest". It is restricted to a three-year wave of capital funding for existing colleges, and would create few, if any, new institutions.

## Reorganisation

Alongside creating these institutes, the strategy proposes a new "T" or Technical Level qualification, equivalent to A Levels. The first wave, to be taught from 2020, would cover Digital, Construction, and Education and Childcare. Further subjects would come on stream in 2022: Legal; Finance and Accounting; Engineering and Manufacturing; Health and Science; Hair and Beauty; Agriculture; Environment and Animal Care; Business and Administrative; Catering and Hospitality; and Creative and Design.

Left to their own devices, employers and colleges will doubtless try to deliver T levels using e-learning methods, at least in part. Online learning was a technology developed within education institutions, but is now captured by the private sector. Even its evangelists recognise that e-learning qualifications

**'Employers have felt secure in the knowledge that they could rely on a ready supply of itinerant labour.'**

s will no longer be allowed to dodge their responsibility

# the future of Britain

have poor credentials, low levels of academic rigour and disastrous completion rates. T levels must be properly taught, with investment in skilled teachers and lecturers, along with the necessary facilities, equipment and buildings.

It is for the working class to determine how these plans will be implemented. An attempt at a quick fix to grab headlines will backfire, leaving Britain less well-prepared, as we've seen in the past with education reform. These Institutes of Technology could give the country the industrial skills we need if funded properly and organised in a strategic, planned, national way.

In 2013 the coalition government identified "eight great technologies" as the priorities for research. These were big data, space, robotics and autonomous systems, synthetic biology, regenerative medicine, agri-science, and advanced materials and energy. Are these correct, and should they be the focus of future industrial and skills development? No government minister, MP, think-tank consultant or self-appointed "thought-leader" can answer those questions. But collectively the working-class, with analysis, planning, and attention to our history, can do so.

## Feeble

The TUC's response to skills development and the challenges of Brexit has been feeble, even by its own low standards. Last year it launched its Great Jobs Agenda. It's a pious document that ducks the need for fresh thinking, and for leadership about independence and sovereignty from the trade union movement. Instead it offers a rehash of tired old ideas like the minimum wage (so why bother to join a trade union?), seats for workers on company boards, "learning accounts" and the customary pandering to identity politics.

The NHS has shown a lead, as reported in the last edition of *Workers*. Health Education England has accepted that we cannot continue to depend on other countries for our supply of trained doctors, nurses and other health professionals. And the Department of Health is expanding the number of places available in existing medical schools and opening new ones. This approach is equally applicable to other

## Apprenticeship levy – we need a better way

PRIOR TO the 2015 general election, the Cameron government realised that migration and wages had become a major issue. For too long companies in Britain had relied on being able to import ready-skilled workers. That creates low levels of skill (not to be confused with low levels of potential) said to cost the British economy £2 billion a year.

That government's hand was forced. It set out plans for the development of apprenticeships across the whole country, with major differences within each devolved administration. The stated aim was to provide for an uplift in skills levels across the economy.

George Osborne, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, declared that apprenticeships were the means to achieve that aim and 3 million would be created by 2020. He established the apprenticeship levy as the way to fund this.

From April 2017 each company with a turnover above £3 million has had to pay the levy, a charge of 0.5 per cent of their payroll. Funding for apprenticeship training was supposed to come from companies claiming back an equivalent amount in training credits. Smaller companies don't pay the levy but can access digital credits to pay for accredited employee training.

It has not turned out like that. About three-quarters of employers are yet to make use of funding for training. Employers' organisations claim, with justifi-

cation, that the levy system and access to the digital accounts is far too complex and ineffective.

This levy scheme is not the answer, even where the apprenticeships created are effective in building skills and of good quality. Since its introduction, the numbers of people starting apprenticeships has crashed from 117,400 in May/June 2016 to 48,000 in the comparable period in 2017. Between 2009/10 and 2011/12 there was a large increase in apprenticeship starts; from then until 2016/17 there have been around 500,000 each year.

Over 40 per cent of companies interviewed said that they did not fully understand how the complicated "standards/level" training system in England operated and reliance on external providers is not seen as workable. Only one in five employers said that they understood how to claim funding from their digital account.

The government is sticking to its line for now but it looks likely its target for training or apprenticeship places won't be reached. The CBI and other open door migration supporters complain about the levy and the new skills caps on migrant labour introduced after the 2016 referendum. But some businesses have called for reform in funding. It's up to organised workers to hold employers to account and press that whatever replaces the levy leads to effective skills investment. ■

sectors of the economy.

Will the small but significant impetus for the development of skills for Britain's future after Brexit be maintained and grow? Or will it be lost in quangos, regionalism and localism, consultancies, vested interests and government inaction?

In recent decades we have seen any amount of vague rhetoric from governments. Remember Osborne's March of the Makers? Probably not! But in the new inde-

pendent situation, if the working-class plans and implements, then a real industrial future is possible.

The British working class's unique contribution to world history so far has been to build the first industrial nation, and to build a trade union movement organised around skill, not religious or political affiliation as elsewhere in the world. New industrial skills in a new independent Britain would be an equal or even greater contribution. ■

## A focus on importing skilled labour denies skill here – and damages foreign countries...

# Brightest and best?

FOR SOME TIME now the free movement of labour has been on the agenda of working people – though their organisations, the trade unions, almost completely avoid mentioning it.

Yet it is almost exclusively discussed in the context of unskilled or semi-skilled labour. Everyone is turning a blind eye to the effect of free movement on the development of skill in Britain.

But it's not just or even mainly about unskilled labour. It's about everything.

Even many of those who want to stop the European Union's free movement are still in thrall to the idea that Britain should be importing the "brightest and the best" as then-immigration minister Damian Green called them in 2012.

Brains matter, of course. We are in the middle of an unprecedented economic revolution where the motive power – the most important means of production – is not water or steam or coal or iron ore, but knowledge.

### The value of people

So in the modern world, the most valuable commodity of all is intellect, people. And the most important condition for trade in goods and services is the import and export of people.

The planes carrying the skilled, to Britain, to Europe, to the US, are the equivalent of the Spanish galleons carrying gold and silver from the New World.

All that gold and silver rotted Spain from within. With no need to invest in developing its own resources, its wealth turned it into an economic backwater.

This will happen to Britain too, if we allow it. We've already seen how this operates with midwives and other health professionals. Why spend money on bursaries for British trainees when you can simply import from abroad?

Look at the scale of the trade in human capital, already. More than a quarter of the doctors in the US were born outside it (double the rate for the population as a whole), along with 15 per cent of nurses – almost all of whom, unlike US nurses, arrive with a bachelor's degree.

The result? The average doctor trained in Sub-Saharan Africa practises there for

just 6.5 years, according to an academic study published in *PLOS Medicine* in 2013. In 2008 Liberia had 1.37 doctors per 100,000 people, as against 250 in the US.

The authors of that study say that half the doctors from the region in the US came there in years when "structural adjustment programs" with "deep cuts to public health care services, were implemented in developing countries by international financial institutions as conditions for refinancing".



EtiAmoss/shutterstock.com

Well, that's an interesting thought. Why does capitalism make life deliberately intolerable for debtor countries? Just count the talent...

The looting of skill is even more blatant in universities. In Britain, fewer than half the PhDs gained in the last academic year, 2016/17, went to UK nationals.

Out of the 167,605 graduate students (excluding PGCE), just 35 per cent (actually, fractionally fewer) were UK nationals, 12.5 per cent from the EU, and 52.5 per cent from the rest of the world. And the great majority of them stay in Britain after graduation.

We are moving in the direction of the US, where fully 81 per cent of full-time graduate students in electrical and petroleum engineering programs at US universities are international students, as

**'The most valuable commodity of all is intellect, people.'**

are 79 per cent in computer science. And those percentages are rising.

Importing skill at such high levels has consequences. The first is that the academic sector as a whole is now utterly dependent on the "free movement" of the world's talent – not to speak of dependence on EU grants.

No surprise, then, at the horror from university managements at Brexit. Academics are fighting for their pensions, but they must also fight for a future for this generation of young British people.

Secondly, there has been no incentive to properly fund science and technology education in schools. Our own young people are deemed to be too expensive – how much easier to import people educated by other countries.

### Sucked dry

And there's the effect on the developing world, on central and eastern Europe – indeed on anywhere outside Britain, the US, Canada, France, Germany and a couple of other countries. The poorer countries are systematically sucked dry of their intellectual talent and unable to develop their own hi-tech industries.

"Most of our best graduates do not apply to study at Bulgarian universities, thus depriving them of talent: after the Chinese, Bulgarians are now the second biggest foreign student community in Germany," wrote Bulgarian academic Ivan Krastev in *The Guardian* in 2015 in an article headlined "Britain's gain is eastern Europe's brain drain".

In the 19th century people talked about the Scramble for Africa. Now it's a scramble for the brains of the whole world. This is why free movement, not just within the EU, is a central tenet of modern imperialism. And why we must oppose any immigration policy that focuses on the "brightest and the best". ■



## Britain could take a world lead in a new nuclear technology, and boost its energy self-sufficiency too...

# Small can be beautiful

THE BRITISH WORKING class has worked with nuclear power for nearly seventy years now. But attention has traditionally been focused on large nuclear stations such as Sizewell B or the new Hinkley C.

Large nuclear stations have been dogged with a number of problems, including planning permission and unproven technology. Above all, they take years and years to build.

But a new technology is being developed which could get round many of these problems. Significantly, much of the development is taking place in Britain, where Rolls-Royce is taking the lead.

The technology centres on so-called Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), which can be built off-site and simply transported to their locations. Producing up to 500 MW each, they could produce of a significant portion of energy self-sufficiency that a post-Brexit Britain will surely need.

### Safety

Of course, we also have to make sure that safety is properly managed and the location of SMRs will therefore be critical. These crucial, but resolvable, issues should not be allowed to detract from the very real advantages British-produced SMRs could bring to the country.

In 2014 the government published a report on the concepts, feasibility and potential of SMRs in Britain. Then in November 2015 it announced that it would invest at least £250 million over five years in nuclear R&D including SMRs.

In March 2016 the government called for expressions of interest in a competition to identify the best value SMR. It said the objective of the initial phase is "to gauge

**'The result could be safe, reliable and affordable low-carbon electricity.'**

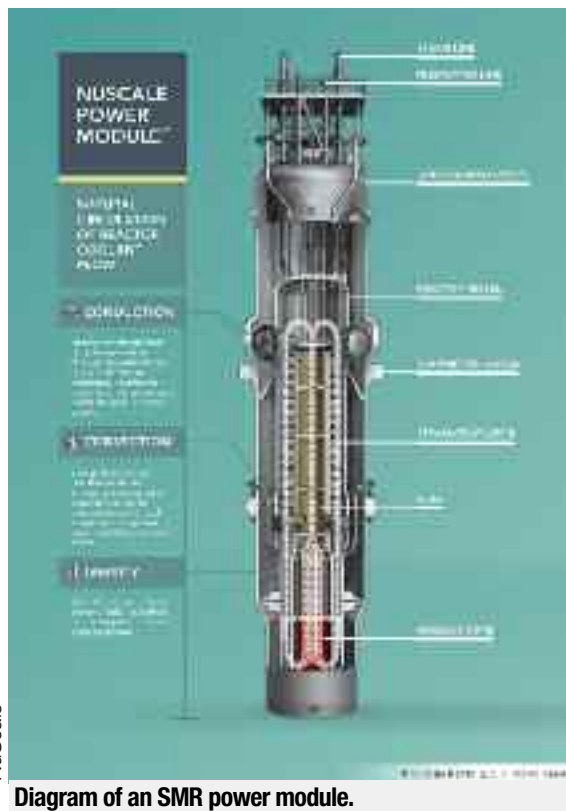


Diagram of an SMR power module.

market interest among technology developers, utilities, potential investors and funders in developing, commercializing and financing SMRs in the UK".

Other companies are keen to be involved. In 2015 US-based Westinghouse had presented a proposal for a "shared design and development model" under which the company would contribute its SMR conceptual design and then partner with the government and industry to complete, license and deploy it. The partnership would be structured as a UK-based enterprise jointly owned by Westinghouse, the government and British industry.

### Partnerships

In October 2016 Westinghouse said it would work with British shipbuilder Cammell Laird as well as Britain's Nuclear Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (NAMRC) on a study to explore potential design efficiencies that would reduce the lead times of its SMR.

Another company, NuScale, an American SMR specialist, said it aims to

deploy its SMR technology in Britain with British partners, so that the first of its 50 megawatt electrical (MWe) units could be operational by the mid-2020s. Rolls-Royce is reported to have submitted a detailed design to the government for a 220 MWe SMR unit.

The Rolls-Royce website says that an SMR programme "represents a once in a lifetime opportunity for UK nuclear companies to design, manufacture and build next generation reactors to meet the UK's energy needs...re-establishing the UK supply chain to a position of global recognition".

SMRs could be made in centralised manufacturing facilities and then transported to anywhere in the country or overseas, producing benefits of scale which would drive down costs.

Rolls-Royce says it is developing a patented modular concept which is designed specifically for factory manufacture and commissioning, speed of installation and reduced onsite construction work

The company notes "a very significant global market need for energy that cannot, in all circumstances, be met by large scale nuclear reactors and so presents a real opportunity for SMRs". It estimates this market to be as large as £400 billion.

The potential benefits are safe, reliable and affordable low-carbon electricity as well as 40,000 skilled jobs, giving a £100 billion boost to the economy. It would also reinvigorate Britain's nuclear certified supply chain – from research and raw materials to high-tech manufacturing and services.

What does this mean in practice? That we are going to have the transformers at the end of the street changed to SMRs?

Of course not. These installations are likely to be located at old military sites or old airfields where a degree of security can be maintained and also a reasonable distance from conurbations. The structures are likely to be the size of a large supermarket.

SMRs offer a useful addition to energy provision. We should work to ensure that the creation of energy self-sufficiency, new jobs, and safety for workers and residents go hand in hand with this opportunity to develop a fundamental industrial sector. ■

During the 2016 referendum those who warned that the EU was a war machine were dismissed as fantasists. Instead, we were told the EU had kept the peace.

# Stop the EU war machine

IT ONLY TAKES a quick look at its history to confirm that the EU was not born as a peace project. The first step towards the EU was the 1951 European Coal and Steel Community when NATO wanted to rearm Germany against the Soviet Union.

From the start, as US warmonger Zbigniew Brzezinski said, “NATO and EU expansion go hand-in-hand, which means there is a partnership between the military push and the economic push.” EU Treaties oblige members to “contribute to the vitality of a renewed Atlantic alliance”.

The European Economic Community (EEC) was born in the time of European states’ colonial wars against nations struggling for independence, in the middle of France’s vicious war in Algeria (viewed as French territory). The EEC endorsed this war.

Fast forward to 1991. After the downfall of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, unlike the other Eastern European countries, refused to allow NATO forces to be based in the country, and refused to apply to join the EEC. This defiance could not be permitted, so NATO aimed to break Yugoslavia apart. The EEC declared that the borders between Yugoslavia’s six republics were international borders and said that the majority people in each republic, not the Yugoslav people as a whole, had the right to self-determination.

## Illegal?

When the Yugoslav government deployed its army to hold the country together, the EEC called this “illegal”. When Yugoslavia was still united, the EEC announced that all the Yugoslav republics were “sovereign and independent with international identity”. The EEC cancelled its trade agreement, ending most of Yugoslavia’s foreign trade.

Germany recognised Croatia, so did the EEC, so did Thatcher. A civil war broke out between those trying to keep the country united and those trying to break it up. NATO attacked, to ensure it was broken up.

Next on the NATO/EU agenda was Iraq. The EU and its leading members backed the illegal attack on Iraq and delivered an ultimatum demanding Iraq’s “unconditional coop-

**This article is an edited version of a speech delivered at a CPBML public meeting in London on 20 February.**



Evgeny Feldman (CC BY-SA 3.0)

**An EU-backed demonstration in Maidan Nezalezhnosti, Kiev’s main square. The protests turned into a war.**

eration”, opening the way to war.

Next was Libya. It was the national governments of EU members Britain and France that attacked the country in 2011, wrecked it, and gave it over to feuding Islamist extremists who murdered its leader. The next year, amid a storm of controversy, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize!

Now the EU is funding Islamist militias in Libya and a new slave trade is flourishing there.

Herman van Rompuy, then president of the EU Council, told us, “Euro-scepticism leads to war.” Really? So euro-scepticism caused the war on Libya, not the pro-EU governments of Britain and France? No. It is

capitalism – in this case under the aegis of the European Union – that causes war, not euro-scepticism.

Next the EU and the USA engineered the splitting of Ukraine. NATO assured Russia that it would not invite Ukraine to join NATO. Then President Bush tried to fast-track Ukraine into NATO and the EU offered it security “cooperation”.

## Excluded

The EU offered an agreement to Ukraine which we were told was just economic and “civilisational”, but it excluded Russia as a trading partner and included “military and security” terms binding Ukraine to NATO.



U was developing its own army were dismissed as  
ce in Europe. The truth is totally different...

ne!



to a fascist coup.

The Agreement called for Ukraine's "ever-deeper involvement in the European security area".

In February 2014 the US government and the EU carried out what George Friedman, Head of Stratfor, or "the Private CIA", called "the most blatant coup in history" – the overthrow of Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovich.

In 2015 Ukraine's government, Russia and the Donbass region all signed the Minsk peace treaty, to re-integrate Donbass into Ukraine. But on 18 January this year Ukraine's parliament said it wanted to take Donbass back by force, if necessary. Ukraine's government also committed itself

to conquering the Crimea, which had voted in March 2014 by more than nine to one to rejoin Russia.

So the EU ignited a proxy war with Russia in Europe – which never happened even in all the years of the Cold War. We are told that the EU is so internationalist, that it promotes peace. Really? Splitting countries – Yugoslavia and Ukraine? Backing a fascist coup in Ukraine?

The EU is an organised force to export wars, to unite for wars against poor countries in Eastern Europe, West Asia and Africa. The bigger and the more centralised it has become, the more it has thrown its weight about.

Now, we are told, we face a threat from Russia. The Pentagon warned us, "Moscow seeks to promote a multi-polar world predicated on the principles of respect for state sovereignty and non-interference in other states' internal affairs, the primacy of the United Nations .... To support these great power ambitions ..." Since when is promoting respect for sovereignty, non-interference and the United Nations, proof of great power ambitions?

### Expansionist?

Since 1991 700,000 square miles of what was the Soviet Union have come under western control. The EU has gained more than 400,000 of these square miles. The other 300,000 are largely in Ukraine. So who is being expansionist?

The notorious FBI/CIA report on alleged Russian election interference admitted: "Judgments are not intended to imply that we have proof that shows something to be a fact." [sic] Even *The New York Times* noted: "What is missing from the public report is what many Americans most eagerly anticipated: hard evidence to back up the agencies' claims that the Russian government engineered the election attack."

We are also told that we face a threat from North Korea. Yet it was Trump who threatened - at the United Nations, of all places - "to totally destroy North Korea ..." No wonder North Korea has sought, and now says it has, a nuclear deterrent.

In December South Korean and US forces conducted a mock invasion of North Korea, under Lieutenant General Thomas

**'Born in colonial wars, the EU is still enmeshed in colonial wars.'**

Vandal – yes, that's his name.

The EU has been imposing sanctions on North Korea since 2006, causing food shortages. In December the UN Security Council unanimously voted for more sanctions to cut 90 per cent of North Korea's oil supplies and get 150,000 North Koreans expelled from other countries. Prime Minister May has just promised to carry over all the EU sanctions against 36 countries including Cuba.

Born in colonial wars, the EU is still enmeshed in colonial wars. Between 2003 and 2013 the EU launched 32 "crisis management" missions. Most managed to make the crises worse. Seven were in former Yugoslavia, 16 in Africa, 2 in Palestine, and one each in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq and Indonesia. The EU has six ongoing military operations – Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2004 and five in Africa.

Turning now to the EU army that *The Guardian* told us was nothing more than the Leave side's fantasy. In 2000, EU leaders from Britain, Germany, Italy and Poland called for a European army. Two years ago Jean-Claude Juncker said: "You would not create a European army to use it immediately. But a common army among the Europeans would convey to Russia that we are serious about defending the values of the European Union." He wants the EU to be a "stronger global actor".

Federica Mogherini, the head of the EU's External Action Service, says that an EU army would be a "credible security provider worldwide" and "we are looking for possibilities to deploy one of our battle groups."

Permanent Structured Cooperation - PESCO – is a giant step towards the EU taking control of military matters. Juncker said, "She is awake, the Sleeping Beauty of the Lisbon Treaty: Permanent Structured

*Continued on page 12*



*Continued from page 11*

Cooperation is happening. I welcome the operational steps taken today by Member States to lay the foundations of a European Defence Union. Our security cannot be out-sourced.”

As part of the largest build-up of NATO forces in Eastern Europe for 30 years, the Baltic States, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria are hosting troops from across NATO’s 29 member states. British, French and Dutch forces are in Estonia. German troops lead the NATO forces in Lithuania.

### German spending

The Baltic States spent US\$ 900 million on the military in 2005. By next year they will be spending more than US\$ 2 billion. Poland is also expanding its arms spending. Germany aims to increase its military spending to more than 35 billion euros by 2019. By 2020, it intends to spend 53 per cent more on military equipment than it did in 2016. It has pledged to increase its armed forces to 200,000.

Last year Germany took matters into its own hands and integrated units from the armies of Romania, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands into its armed forces, the Bundeswehr. Romania’s 81st Mechanized Brigade joined the Bundeswehr’s Rapid Response Forces Division. The spearhead Czech 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade joined the Bundeswehr’s 10th Armoured Division. Two Dutch brigades also joined the Bundeswehr.

The May government said it would not join PESCO, but Sir Stuart Peach, the Chief of Defence Staff, wants us to “keep the door open” to full membership. British defence companies, not wanting to miss out on new procurement opportunities, want us in.

The government has confirmed it wants to participate in the EU defence programmes which are the foundations of PESCO. It is willing to pay into the European Defence Fund and to participate fully in the European Defence Research Programme and the European Industrial Development Programme even after we leave the EU.

This would require us to pay large sums to the EU and to obey Single Market rules in



Rokas Tenys/shutterstock.com

**NATO exercise in Kaunas, Lithuania, February 2017.**

the sphere of defence. It would bind us into EU decision-making.

At the recent UK-French summit, Prime Minister May backed President Macron’s proposal for a European Intervention Initiative. Macron wants to “go further” than PESCO. This too would tie us into the European Defence Union, undermining our national defence independence.

The government is taking part in a trial of the EU’s Coordinated Annual Review of Defence. This is a financial mechanism whereby the European Commission appraises our defence budget plans to integrate member nations’ militaries. Ministers have now indicated that we might stay in this and in EU Battlegroups (which place UK forces under EU Council policy control) and even play a “partial” or “project” role in PESCO. May said recently that we should be open to deploying our defence resources “with and indeed through EU mechanisms”.

### Not even a vote

Since November 2016, the government has signed us up to all parts of the EU’s defence union except one, without any vote by MPs. These include finance, a command centre and a central budget. If we stay in them, or if any of them go into an exit treaty, as the government wants, we will not have left the

European Union.

How do we stop the EU war machine? Time and again, the British people have shown they are increasingly for peace, while our so-called representatives vote for war – Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya. In 2013 Cameron planned to invade Syria. But when MPs asked their constituents for feedback they were besieged by emails “overwhelmingly opposed” to intervention. So foreign policy must be under democratic, working class control.

Nations are obliged to uphold the United Nations Charter, which is based on respect for the sovereignty of all nations. We are for real internationalism, upholding all nations’ sovereignty and independence, starting with our own. We are for independence, for peace, for socialism.

Resist the warmongering against Russia, North Korea and China! Stop the EU war machine! ■

**‘The government has confirmed it wants to take part in EU defence.’**



# CPBML MAY DAY MEETINGS 2018

## TAKE CONTROL FOR AN INDEPENDENT BRITAIN!

### The referendum result was clear.

Now sections of the establishment are manoeuvring to thwart a full Brexit by preventing a clean departure.

What's to be afraid about? If the EU continues to refuse real negotiations, we should be prepared to walk away.

The people must take responsibility and speak out. We must unite to make government and Westminster too afraid to construct deceitful half-way houses that mean no real departure.

**What does Britain need to be an independent country?** Control over our economy and our borders, and the freedom to trade in the way that suits us best. Sovereignty over our land and our seas. Control over our laws. And we must assert control in the workplace – an end to the EU's anti-union laws.

That means no to the single market, no to the customs union, no to the European Court of Justice. It means real independence.

**Leaving the EU means we cut ties with it.** We are not in a "divorce". We don't have to pay maintenance and we don't have to give the EU visiting rights. We will be leaving. It's that simple.

We are a country rich in skill, in science and technology, one of the largest economies in the world. Independence will liberate us from the diktats, doom and decline of the EU. We have a world to win.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the CPBML, we invite you to celebrate with us the prospects for independence.

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



### GLASGOW

Speakers and discussion  
Tuesday 1 May, 7pm  
Renfield Conference Centre  
260 Bath Street  
Glasgow G2 4JP

### LEEDS

Conversation and refreshments  
Tuesday 1 May, 7.30pm  
Cosmopolitan Hotel  
Lower Briggate  
Leeds LS1 4AE

### LONDON

Speakers and social  
Tuesday 1 May, 7.30pm  
Conway Hall  
Red Lion Square  
London WC1R 4RL

**SEE CPBML.ORG.UK FOR UP-TO-DATE NEWS OF ALL CPBML EVENTS**

# Food safety and animal welfare concern or even alarm may be The EU has no more interest in animals than it does in workers

## We can make food safer:

IT'S COMMON to be asked to sign a petition about deterioration in food safety or reduced animal welfare because of Brexit. We read many headlines such as "Brexit could be bad news for food safety, experts warn."

The implication is frequently that the EU is the guarantor of food safety and animal welfare. But that just doesn't stand up to scrutiny.

In the horsemeat scandal of 2013, equine meat labelled as beef entered the food chain across Europe. The House of Commons Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs report on that incident was not critical of British or Irish producers. It expressed concern that the contamination was the result of fraud and other criminal activity across the EU.

Anne McIntosh MP, chair of that parliamentary committee, said: "The evidence suggests a complex network of companies trading in and mislabelling beef or beef products which is fraudulent and illegal". EU regulations on labelling of food products were ineffectual; the free movement of goods was far more important.

Before the referendum our own legislation demanded higher standards than EU regulations. Outside the EU we can have our own better legislation. For example the EU regulation of 2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing came into force across Europe on 1 January 2013. But England and Wales have also retained national rules that give greater protection to animals at the time of killing than the EU regulation.

But it would be a mistake to think that legislation and regulation is the guarantor of food safety. After Brexit we are still in capitalist Britain. As any worker knows, a capitalist – including those involved in food production – will be prepared to sacrifice safety for profit. It's just that the EU makes it easier for

them. The best defence of food safety will be the actions of those workers in Britain who produce our food and control imports.

But what we do as consumers of food will also have an influence. In any trade someone needs to purchase the products. There is no evidence that the British public is in a headlong rush to purchase more imported food since the referendum; quite the contrary.

### Buy British

Recently published YouGov research based on data taken after the referendum showed that the public seem to be more inclined to buy British food. Two-thirds of the respondents said they would prefer to buy British when they can. Maybe consumers have come to the unsurprising conclusion that knowing where your food comes from and eating food which has not travelled half way around the world in cold storage is tastier and safer.

This seems to be backed up in action. All the supermarkets have increased the visibility of their labels which indicate Britain as the source of a product – presumably responding to sales as well as the YouGov consumer survey. It would be good to repeat that survey for 2018 and assess the trend.

If the supermarkets themselves were keen to switch to cheaper imports (as they did with fresh milk) they would be changing their supply chains already. Instead there is more evidence of a policy to buy British and more local sourcing.

The last edition of *Workers* reported on the Co-op policy of only selling British meat and how they had worked with their suppliers to arrange that. Now Morrisons, which already sources around two-thirds of all their products in Britain, is undertaking a major project to make its products as local as possible. The emphasis is on reducing the distance products travel from farm to your plate.

Consumer activity can exert a small influence on food safety – for example insistence on clear origin labelling, how animals are reared and choosing to buy British. But what counts more is how we as a country set the standards for food safety now and police them.

In recent years the reduction in funding



Beef carcasses in Smithfield Market, London.

Jorge Royan/www.royan.com.ar (CC BY-SA 3.0)

for the Food Standards Agency and for local authority environmental health officers have both had an impact on food safety. There is little point strengthening our legislation post Brexit if we don't have the personnel to ensure regulations are adhered to.

Britain, not the EU, will strengthen regulation of abattoirs in May 2018. CCTV will be mandatory in all slaughterhouses in England. The veterinary profession fully supports that. Scotland is now consulting with a view to replicate the English legislation and a call has been made for Wales to follow suit. Businesses have six months to implement this legislation.

Such technology could also provide an opportunity to review the Official Vet (OV) role which is currently over-reliant on professionals from other EU countries.

**'Britain, not the EU, will strengthen regulation of abattoirs in May.'**



any of us. But the public debate is misleading at times.  
workers...

# the responsibility is ours



The EU requires OV's on site to perform work normally of a statutory nature on behalf of an EU member state, often at public expense. In Britain we formerly had Local Veterinary Inspectors (LVIs).

But few UK vets wanted to undertake the OV role as a full-time job, and the expense of this system has made smaller abattoirs unviable. Historically abattoirs in the UK were numerous, local and accessible in every agricultural area. This meant that the transportation of live animals was kept to a minimum.

Now a big agricultural county like Pembrokeshire in South Wales has no abattoir. All animals for food consumption must be transported out of the county. If anything the situation is worse in Scotland. The abattoir on Orkney closed in January and others

have closed since. Yet the Scottish Government felt it could not support a small unit on Skye because of EU state aid rules.

As well as the animal welfare considerations, there is the cost impact on small farms of transport and occupying their key worker for the best part of the day. And worse, small producers fear losing the market altogether.

One of the aims of a workforce study being undertaken by veterinary associations here is that "there should be an investigation as to why UK veterinary undergraduates are not attracted to careers in food safety and meat hygiene, and explore measures" to change that.

The British Veterinary Association (BVA) president speaking to a conference of vets earlier this year said, "Salaries are really not high enough for the very skilled work they

do. OV's have a very responsible job, and work in a very noisy and challenging environment. It is very hard work and they never get a chance to sit down.

"The training our European colleagues get has much more emphasis on abattoir work, so these people have come in, filled these posts and done an extremely good job."

Do they really need an investigation to see why this role is not attractive? Pay, conditions and training would seem a good place to start. Does the introduction of CCTV in slaughterhouses also offer an opportunity to re-design this noisy job where the workers never get to sit down?

## Higher standards

Environment Secretary Michael Gove has launched a call for evidence for a ban on live export of animals for slaughter after Brexit. This is further indication of a desire to raise welfare standards post Brexit. And it is likely to be popular with the public and the veterinary profession.

The context here is that each year over four thousand sheep are transported from Britain to continental Europe for slaughter. This is the proposal that will make the headlines. However, as part of the same process, the Farm Animal Welfare Committee has also launched a review of the existing welfare standards for animals during transport and this is equally applicable to movements between different parts of Britain.

In response the BVA said: "We believe that production animals should not be transported long distances to the abattoir but should be slaughtered as near to the point of production as possible. Animals should be transported on the hook, as meat, not on the hoof, as live animals."

So, do we dare to be different? We have a long tradition of higher standards and we should be even more ambitious. We could design a new infrastructure and have smaller facilities closer to the farm. And the role of the official vet could be done differently – and properly rewarded. ■

Feel free to respond to the call for evidence at <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/animal-health-and-welfare/live-exports-and-improving-welfare-in-transport/>

The tsunami of outsourcing over the past decade has led merry-go-round finally comes to an end, it's the workers a

# Outsourcing: the vultur



Elliott Brown (CC BY-SA 2.0)

**Rubble: a Carillion building site in Birmingham. Nothing will now be built there for a long time.**

WRITING IN *The Daily Telegraph* on 22 January, Rupert Soames, chief executive of Serco, quoted Lenin: “capitalists will sell us the rope with which we will hang them”, in trying to pin the blame on everyone else.

This is rich coming from Serco considering it nearly caused Carillion’s collapse in 2014, when that company was ensconced in scandal following the London Olympics security fiasco and the tagging of offenders fraud. Though Serco is distancing itself from Carillion, its own financial health is also parlous as witnessed by the Barts and the London NHS Trust contract in 2017.

Everyone is blaming everyone else for the collapse of Carillion, though in fact the whole outsourcing “industry” reeks of the corruption of rotting business practices.

It is largely the same audit companies that failed to see the 2007-2008 banking collapse that have been signing off Carillion’s accounts: KPMG, PWC, EY and Deloitte.

The “big four” audit companies handle the accounts of 90 per cent of Britain’s so-called blue chip companies. They have pocketed over £71 million in fees – while missing the estimated £1.5 billion debt, the £1 billion pension deficit, and the fact that Carillion only seemed to have £17 million cash reserves at the time of collapse.

## Bonus payments

Yet Carillion managed to pay £376 million from 2012 to 2016 to shareholders in dividends and bonus payments. And now the

estimated £50 million cost of the insolvency will come from the asset stripping of Carillion.

To date 16 of Carillion’s 326 “companies” have gone bust with the domino effect continuing among the rest. What was Carillion’s core objective? Presumably securing another contract just to keep

**‘Carillion managed to pay £376 million to shareholders from 2012 to 2016.’**

to a culture of rotten business practices. When the  
and the public who are left to pay the bill...

# es feeding off billions

running on the spot.

As Carillion sinks, so the asset stripping and seizure of contracts by competitors becomes a frenzy. Serco, BGIS/Brookfield (Canadian) and OCS to name but a few swoop in to feed on public sector contracts in health and education.

Almost immediately the existing terms and conditions of workers are attacked. Trade union recognition is denied or withdrawn. Transfer of undertakings regulations and redundancy protections are denied. Redundancy issues are referred to the Insolvency Service, which will place workers' recompense at the bottom of the heap after investors, shareholders, businesses and HMRC, which will take priority.

Every conceivable weasel word and slippery practice emerges. The TUC, coordinating the trade union response, meets and exchanges "thoughts" with the government. Meanwhile the crowd of vultures grows. Sadly, the squabbling between Unite, GMB and Unison continues, with each trying to poach members off the others.

But Carillion is not alone. Capita, which "manages" – among others – the London Congestion Charge, Jobseekers Allowance, Teachers Pension Scheme, TV Licence collection, local government contracts, Ministry of Defence, Department of Work and Pensions, has seen its shares halve in value since the end of January.

## 'Short-term focus'

Even Jonathan Lewis, Capita's chief executive, describes Capita as "too complex" and "driven by short-term focus". The government calls Capita a "strategic supplier", a phrase used previously to describe Carillion.

Capita harvested 154 new public sector contracts in 2017. Unlike Carillion, Capita has large cash reserves, estimated at over £1 billion. Profit forecasts are for a return of £270 to £300 million, down from £400 million last year.

Faced with the downturn, the company is ruthlessly cutting jobs, dumping unprofitable businesses, moving away from collecting contracts for contracts' sake – focusing instead solely on profit returns. Its staff, 50,000 in Britain and 70,000 worldwide, must feel nervous about the future. Incidentally, Capita is audited by KPMG.

Interserve is another major outsourcing company, with an estimated £3 billion revenue and contracts covering the NHS and local government. After a £200 million loss on its waste-to-energy business in Scotland, it has tried to shift the bill to its 80,000 workforce, with attacks on wages and on terms and conditions.

Babcock provides another example. Essentially an engineering company, it has been bidding for contracts in everything from shipbuilding, the railways and local government construction to NHS soft facilities management.

As crisis surrounds Babcock's competitors it has dusted off its engineering credentials to distance itself from them: 20 per cent outsourcing, 80 per cent engineering is the mantra. Its order book of £31 billion looks healthy. But as the prime customer is the Ministry of Defence, and the MoD has a £21 billion black hole in its accounts, alarm bells are ringing.

Carillion, Serco, Capita, Interserve, Babcock are just five players, but the list goes on – ISS, G4S, Virgin and so on. The privateers like Serco head Rupert Soames argue that "[state] monopolies are always bad, and always become inefficient and focused on protecting their own interests".

Private outsourcing, he said in January, brings to the public "choice, new ideas, greater efficiency, reduced costs...along with the assurance that the taxpayer is getting best value for money". The financial crises rippling through the outsourcing monopolies say otherwise.

**'From 2010 to 2015 government ministers have outsourced over £120 billion of public service contracts.'**

From 2010 to 2015 government ministers have between them outsourced over £120 billion of public service contracts – almost double the value of all contracts outsourced up to 2010. They cannot blame civil servants for this: the drive came from the Treasury and then-Chancellor Osborne.

In addition to the management failures of the outsourcing companies, Carillion was attacked by hedge funds and the aptly named vulture funds which gamble on a collapse in share prices by buying, selling, re-buying cheap and then selling on at a profit the shares or bonds in companies in crisis.

An estimated £300 million was made by hedge funds betting against Carillion's collapse. Blackrock – the world's largest hedge fund – is said to have made £40 million from Carillion's collapse. Ex-Chancellor Osborne reputedly earns £650,000 per annum working one day a week for Blackrock. It's a small world. ■

## Meet the Party

**The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist's regular series of London public meetings in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1R 4RL, will continue on Tuesday 17 July (details to be announced). There will also be May Day meetings across Britain on 1 May – see page 13 for details.**

**M As well as our regular public meetings we hold informal discussions with interested workers and study sessions for those who want to take the discussion further. If you are interested, we want to hear from you. Call us on 020 8801 9543 or send an email to [info@cpbml.org.uk](mailto:info@cpbml.org.uk)**



As parts of the rail network fail and the government's White Paper to bring railways back into public ownership is gathering momentum...

# Foreign firms line up to

YET MORE foreign firms are seeking to join the gravy train that is Britain's privatised rail franchising system, but the system they want to be part of is creaking under the weight of its own contradictions.

Spain's state-owned rail operator Renfe has now been added to the Department for Transport's list of pre-qualified franchise bidders. It joins the state railways of Germany, France, Italy and the Netherlands on a list that includes firms from Japan and China – only five are British.

Also on the list are private firms Nuovo Trasporto Viaggiatori (an Italian high-speed operator), and Transdev (a French operator of rail services in Germany and the USA, and many French light rail systems).

And British operator FirstGroup has been subject to a hostile bid by US private equity group Apollo Management, looking for a fast buck.

Britain's rail industry is attractive to these new players, no doubt influenced by some of the barmier aspects of the system. One example is this year's unusually harsh winter and heavy snowfall, when many passenger trains were cancelled. But this has proved to be a money-spinner for the private companies as the rules meant they could claim compensation from Network Rail because their trains couldn't run.

## Retained

While this compensation is supposed to be passed on to passengers, much of it is not and is retained by the rail operators. Operators in England and Wales received £181 million from Network Rail for unplanned disruption in the 2016/17 financial year, but paid out just £74 million in compensation to delayed passengers. So we have a publicly funded infrastructure owner paying private companies for the British weather.

But the privateers queuing to make profits from British fare- and tax-payers may not have things so easy in future.

The East Coast Main Line franchise seems in particular to be a poisoned chalice. The two previous private operators both had to hand back the keys after defaulting on their commitment to pay the government out of profits made from the franchise. After a profitable spell under public ownership, the



Photo courtesy Bring Back British Rail

10 April 2018, King's Cross, London: campaign group Bring Back British Rail call for a public Enterprise

current operator Stagecoach has failed dismally to honour its financial commitments and the franchise is about to fail.

Stagecoach has operated the franchise under the Virgin branding, with the Virgin Group having a token shareholding. But the Virgin magic they were clearly hoping for didn't materialise. Stagecoach and Virgin massively overbid for the franchise, promising to pay the government £3.3 billion by 2023. Instead, losses mean a £165 million bond put up by the parent companies has been completely used up, and the franchise will come to an end three years early.

The government wants to reward bad behaviour which is effectively costing it (and the British people) billions by cobbling together a "management contract" with Stagecoach to get it through the next few years. But there has been a political outcry over this option, and now Transport Secretary "Failing Grayling" is threatened by crowd-funded legal action if this happens.

Renationalisation group Bring Back British Rail is leading this initiative, and

wants to see the East Coast Main Line back under public ownership and control. Bring Back British Rail's solicitors have also said that they would seek legal intervention if Grayling refuses to block Stagecoach and Virgin from bidding for more rail franchises.

Ellie Harrison from the campaign group said: "The current Virgin Trains East Coast franchise has failed within three years yet the Secretary of State for Transport Chris Grayling is allowing its operators, Stagecoach and Virgin, to simply walk away, free to bid for rail franchises again."

This comes as bidding has been opened for a new "West Coast Partnership", which will be running trains on the existing West Coast Main Line, and HS2 when it is built and opened in 2026.

Virgin is of course the current operator of the highly profitable services run on the West Coast Main Line, and this places Grayling in an awkward position. It means that in order to avoid banning Virgin from bidding for the new West Coast/HS2 franchise, he may well have to swallow the bitter

tehall farce leads to ever more absurdities, the campaign momentum around Britain...

# plunder rail network



st Coast line.

pill of handing the East Coast Main Line back to the public sector to run.

And it is not just Virgin and Stagecoach that are in trouble. A downturn in passenger numbers after over a decade of sustained growth is playing havoc with recently awarded franchises.

## Losses

Serco, which took on the London to Scotland sleeper train franchise, has lost £30.6 million. Assumptions made by others bidding for franchises have also gone awry. FirstGroup is reportedly struggling with its finances in both the South Western franchise it recently wrested from Stagecoach, and in the renewed TransPennine franchise where redundancies are being made.

Abellio has blamed the collapse of its proposed partner Carillion for pulling out of bidding for the Welsh franchise (controlled by the Welsh Assembly) – but rumours of this pullout were circulating in November, long before the Carillion mess was revealed.

Carillion was Network Rail's biggest

contractor before it collapsed. With Amey having moved in to gobble up the more lucrative contracts, it has replaced Carillion in the top slot. Despite Amey having provided a lifeboat for a majority of former Carillion staff, many skilled rail staff have been made redundant at a time when skills are in short supply. Amey has is also one of the bidders for the Welsh franchise.

The absence of effective train procurement planning and the prevalence of short term thinking in Britain's crazy rail franchising system is now seeing nearly new trains less than three years old replaced on South Western Trains at massive taxpayer expenses, to sit in sidings and very possibly be destined for the scrapyards.

Meanwhile, old London Underground District Line trains have been tarted up, given a van engine, and pressed into service in the West Midlands. Other operators may follow suit in using these recycled underground trains.

First's Great Western Railway (GWR) has announced that it will bolster its fleet with 19 of the trains displaced from Thameslink services by new trains; these older trains are well over 30 years old. Almost unbelievably, the stated reason is that they will partially replace much more modern trains on services to Heathrow Airport.

GWR has taken over the Heathrow Express services run by the company that owns Heathrow Airport. The current and very modern Heathrow Express depot at Old Oak Common is to be demolished to make way for HS2. With the takeover by GWR the replacement depot at Langley will no longer be needed. GWR will absorb the maintenance work at its other depots, mainly Reading, and all the skilled engineering staff at the Heathrow Express depot will be made redundant.

But new trains are not always welcomed by passengers. Those now running on Thameslink services through London have been slated for having "ironing board" seats and no power sockets for electronic devices!

Given that these trains are running on routes where journeys may be up to 3-4 hours, it is unsurprising that a train that seems to have been designed to modern (and spartan!) metro standards more suited to short distance commuter routes has gone

**'A downturn in passenger numbers is playing havoc with recently awarded franchises...'**

down so badly.

Transport Minister Jo Johnson has been ridiculed after inflaming feelings further by suggesting that the hard seats on Thameslink will become more comfortable with use. One social media user described his comments as "blithering twaddle"!

The lack of planning by the government coupled with its knee-jerk cancellation of the planned electrification of the Midland Main Line from London to Sheffield has created a train crisis. The old former British Rail high speed diesel trains currently operating many services can't be used after next year as they will not have their slam doors replaced by power operated doors as required by law. There is now no time to convert them by then, and there are no suitable trains available to replace them now that the line will not be electrified – any new trains will only be available after 2021.

## Cancelled

"Failing Grayling" has now been shown to have cancelled the electrification to save money, not for the unconvincing reasons originally proffered. He originally said that the development of trains that could run on both electricity and diesel power renders electrification superfluous. Critics have pointed out that the new generation of such "bi-mode" trains are more expensive to build, will perform less efficiently, will be heavier creating much greater track wear, and therefore more expensive in the long term. And such trains contradict the government's stated aim to abolish diesel trains by the 2040s.

It is little wonder that the calls for returning Britain's railways to public ownership grow ever louder! ■

Despite the supposed threat to democracy from populism, the anti-populist reaction is worse...

# Populism and reaction



Joachim Seidler (CC BY-SS 2.0)

Refugees on the Hungarian M1 highway on their march towards the Austrian border, 4 September 2015.

*Populism and the European Culture wars: The Conflict of values between Hungary and the EU*, by Frank Furedi, paperback, 144 pages, ISBN 978-1138097438, Routledge, 2017, £14.99, Kindle and eBook editions available.

FRANK FUREDI, the Budapest-born sociologist, argues that despite the media's attention on the supposed threat to democracy from populist movements, the anti-populist reaction is far worse.

A free and open debate about whether to leave the EU led to our majority democratic decision to back independence. Furedi notes that for the dwindling minority who want to overturn the vote, "European federalism symbolized a sacred cause, while nationalism was assigned the role of anti-Christ."

As Furedi points out, "Anti-populism has constructed a culturally warped view of populism that casts a movement questioning the

elite cultural consensus in a negative light." That intolerant and reactionary viewpoint characterises populist movements as xenophobic, anti-democratic, and totalitarian.

EU commissioner Margot Wallström said that nationalists caused the Second World War and that eurosceptics risked a "return to the Holocaust". Herman van Rompuy, a past president of the EU Council, agreed; he said "Euroscepticism leads to war." Euroscepticism was not to blame for the war on Libya for instance; rather it was the pro-EU governments of Britain and France.

The European Union presents itself as the enlightened minority with a duty to impose its values on the benighted majority, just as the old empires did. It wants elite rule, not democracy.

The EU now bullies Eastern Europe's countries after "introducing an economic shock therapy that led to the privatisation of the economy, mass unemployment, and the dismantling of the old Hungarian welfare state."

## 'Cultural imperialists'

Furedi comments that many of Hungary's critics "come across as latter-day cultural imperialists who feel that they have the right to impose their values on Hungarian society.... They do not seem to realize that the

**"Nationalism was assigned the role of anti-Christ..."**

problems facing Hungarian society will only be resolved through the efforts of its people, not by foreign advocacy organizations meddling in the affairs of an independent sovereign nation."

The EU damned the Hungarian government for building fences on its border with Serbia and Croatia in autumn 2015, which significantly cut uncontrolled migration. It said nothing about Norway and the three EU Baltic states building fences on their borders with Russia.

Who opposes democracy? Furedi argues that some who back our staying in the EU are now drawing on Europe's more regrettable, anti-democratic traditions. They oppose Europe's other values, the Enlightenment values of democracy and freedom.

As he observes, "The rise of mass politics since the nineteenth century has continually provoked the fear and hostility of the political establishment."

Nations are the necessary foundations of democracy. Furedi sums this up, "...borders, which are essential for the maintenance of national sovereignty, are so far the only foundation that humanity has discovered for the institutionalization of democratic accountability. It is within familiar borders that citizens felt confident to work out their ideas and enter into dialogue and debate with one another. Without borders a citizen becomes subject to a power that cannot be held to account and this is why – from a democratic perspective – it is so important to counter the anti-populist crusade against national sovereignty."

Furedi concludes that popular sovereignty is the most robust foundation for a flourishing public life. Anti-populist opinion constantly challenges political legitimacy based on that sovereignty because it has no trust in people to make intelligent choices. "Illiberal anti-populism constitutes the principal threat to democracy in Europe today." ■

**"The EU wants elite rule not democracy..."**



## A thriving engineering sector is vital for Britain, argues Tom Brown...

# Engineering's decline

*Tragedy and challenge: an inside view of UK engineering's decline and the challenge of the Brexit economy*, by Tom Brown, hardback, 366 pages, ISBN 978-1788035316, Matador 2017, £19.99, Kindle edition also available.

THIS SPLENDID book is full of ideas about how Britain can succeed as an independent country. Tom Brown worked in engineering businesses for his entire 45-year career. Throughout the book he stresses the vital importance of a thriving manufacturing sector, especially the key engineering sector.

Manufacturing is still significant for Britain. Manufacturing output rose by nearly 50 per cent in real terms from 1970 to 2000. But in the 20 years to 2014 the contribution of manufacturing to Britain's total GDP fell, from 27 per cent to under 11 per cent. The proportion of manufacturing jobs fell from 29 per cent of the workforce to 10 per cent.

### Debt

Brown notes that the main problem has been and still is bank debt, the vast bulk of which is not for new investment but for buying existing assets. As he writes, "all too often 'the market' in practice becomes 'the City', what they will finance and what strategies and managements they will back, multiplying the power over UK society of a very small group of extremely highly paid Londoners whose only motivation is their own short-term profit ...".

For fund managers in the City capital investment is seen as "...a drain on resources rather than as an opportunity for profitable growth". In particular, private equity houses "invest almost nothing in longer-term projects...as these reduce short-term profit and cash and are unlikely to assist their all-important exit valuation." In 2014 members of the British Private Equity &

**"Overall the City has made an extremely negative impact..."**



Fabio Boccuzzi/shutterstock.com

**Abandoned factory buildings, Edinburgh.**

Venture Capital Association "invested" £4.3 billion in the UK, almost all buying existing assets. Only £0.3 billion was venture capital.

Brown sums up: "Overall the City has made an extremely negative impact on quoted engineering companies, particularly through short-term pressure for profit at the expense of investment in people, technology, and marketing, and by promoting unfocused takeovers, and encouraging debt. In striving so hard to create instant wealth, it inhibits its creation."

His remedy is to prevent the banks from manufacturing debt. This would not only greatly reduce the amount of debt – "the root cause of so very many of our business and also social problems" – but, he believes, also reduce the power of the financial sector and the risk of further crises.

### Foreign ownership

Foreign ownership now accounts for half our national engineering output. In 1973 foreign-owned companies produced only 15 per cent of manufacturing value added. Overseas acquisitions of UK companies are classified as inward investment – "so we record selling the UK to foreigners as 'investment'."

Brown points out that companies coming under foreign ownership "generally contribute less to the UK economy and society than domestically owned operations", and importantly we lose control of our destiny.

He is critical of government industrial policy, "The 'Northern Powerhouse' is just a phrase, and it is hard to believe that devolution in England will achieve more than a further layer of bureaucracy. There is wide agreement on the need for North-South rebalancing, but I believe the fundamental key to achieving this is the recovery of manufacturing."

British governments here have seen engineering as just "metal bashing". The author asked Labour's Ed Balls, when he was Chief Economic Advisor to the Treasury, his view on the decline of engineering. Balls replied, "You might as well mourn for the dinosaurs."

Brown ends with recommendations across the economy. His key points:

In industrial policy: "Choose engineering as a sector to back. Consider import substitution and rebuilding supply chains, and support for exporter." He also calls for the establishment of an engineering investment fund.

In energy policy: "Establish and implement a clear and effective policy embracing cost and security of supply, with protection of the environment."

And in education, invest more in primary and secondary schools, and promote vocational training..."Improve funding for technical subjects in universities, and increase their contacts with engineering industry," he writes. ■

**The British working class was the first proletariat in the world of the land. It had to make a stand or go under...**

# British trade unions: early

WORKING CLASS organisation has a long history in our land. Trade unions have existed in Britain for well over three centuries, working to maintain or improve working conditions for wage-earners. Can we take anything useful from this lengthy experience for application to current times, or is the past redundant?

Recognisable trade unions appeared in the latter part of the seventeenth century. There were some collective combinations and approaches evident even before then. These cannot really be seen as forerunners of trade unionism for many were within guild frameworks. But demonstrably some people did come together and act collectively to determine aspects of their working lives.

## Common interests

In both medieval and early modern times, working people asserted their common interests, at times quite successfully. Glimpses of them appear as inverted praise in the historical records. In 1383 the Corporation of the City of London prohibited all “congregations, covins and conspiracies of workmen”. In 1387 the serving-men of the London cordwainers (shoemakers) were in rebellion against the “overseers of the trade” and made a fraternity.

In 1406 the serving-men of the saddlers asserted that they had a fraternity for “time out of mind”, which the masters declared was out to raise wages. In 1538 the Bishop of Ely reported to Thomas Cromwell that twenty-one journeymen shoemakers of Wisbech had assembled on a hill outside the town and demanded the master shoemakers meet them about an advance in their wages.

Particularly admirable were the stone-

masons. They had a history of congregations and confederacies, which were expressly prohibited by Act of Parliament in 1425. It is probable that the masons, wandering over the country from one job to another particularly on cathedrals and churches were united, not just in any local guild, but in a trade fraternity of some extent. Certainly stonemasons were among the earliest expert practitioners of demarcation disputes and restrictive practices.

Journeymen, skilled manual workers, moved from place to place carrying a bag of tools and, because of their degree of skill, were sought after. The extent should not be overestimated, but it seems that in certain cases journeymen fraternities existed within the craft guilds of the Middle Ages, acting to further the interests of their own members.

This occasionally extended to strikes either against the employers or against the authority of the guild. Many established long-lived combinations, some of which could only be put down by new laws, and had alms-boxes to help members’ families that were in distress.

The guilds were run by master craftsmen employing journeymen and labourers, and there were journeymen who wished to become a master too. So the guilds were not the equivalent of a trade union. Yet they were also about protecting the quality of craft work by ensuring that only those with the necessary expertise could participate in the craft. They aimed to preserve those features of regulation which craftsmen had long recognised as “giving them protection from the cold blast of an unregulated market.” Today’s trade unions still need to protect workers’ professionalism from the same undermining market.

## Skilled artisans

The trade unions in the 17th and early 18th centuries did not generally emerge as a product of the factory system. Rather they came from skilled artisans: shoe-makers, cabinet-makers, tailors, building workers, weavers and so on.

These workers operated usually in small workshops or even from their own home. Long before the industrial revolution, property-less people – having only labour power



**The crackdown on Luddites relied on troops, huge fines, but many were acquitted because juries felt they could not**

to sell – were coming together no matter how small or few in number.

Accordingly, the unions never began nationally in Britain, nor were they imposed from outside. They all started locally in parish, village, or town, then spread wider. Generally the first combinations of workers were formed around a skill or a community of similar jobs, based on their capacity to fight, which gave them potential strength and a greater advantage than those who were unable to argue or bargain directly at all.

Early British trade unionism was a self-generated product of the workers involved, acting alone without external union organisers, do-gooders or political parties. The original unions didn’t have grandiose notions or even call themselves national. They tended to have prosaic names like “Steam Engine Makers”. Members worked at the trade, and when they got big enough employed a secretary.

The condition of the growth of these unions was based on an absolute suspicion of anyone who didn’t make steam engines (or whatever) and didn’t go to work every

**‘The unions never began nationally in Britain, nor were they imposed from outside.’**

World to emerge out

# y origins



rewards and police informers. Many accused rely on the honesty of police witnesses.

day in the trade.

The unions were born and developed in conspiracy against the employers and the employers' government. Trade unionism in engineering first emerged in the 1780s when a Friendly Society of Mechanics was established in Bolton, Blackburn and Chorley.

By 1799 employers in London asked Parliament to make it illegal for millwrights and engineers to combine, which resulted in the passing of the Combination Acts in 1799 and 1800.

Running through all the approach of these unions is that only those who work shall control. It was true of the boilermakers, shipwrights, wainwrights and the rest. The main questions for these craft unions were "who controls?" and "who runs the union?" There was suspicion of those who did not work at the trade, who were not out of their ranks.

- In the next issue we will trace the path of our trade unions from emergence into legality in the early 19th century to the present day. ■

🐦 @CPBML

# NO ADVANCE WITHOUT INDEPENDENCE

Worried about the future of Britain? Join the CPBML.

The Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist held its 17th Congress in 2015. The published Congress documents are available at [www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk). At that time the need to leave the EU was urgent, and on 23 June 2016 the working class of Britain took the vital step to eject the EU from Britain and entered a new epoch. The tasks identified at the 17th Congress remain as relevant as ever, and the decision to leave the EU makes the question of Britain's independence immediate and practical. The tasks facing the working class and Party are:

**Develop a working class industrial strategy** for the building of an independent industrial manufacturing base for Britain, including the development of our energy industry. Our capacity to produce is the basis for providing the public services the working class needs.

**Rebuild Britain's trade unions** to embrace all industries and workplaces. The trade unions must become a true class force not an appendage to the Labour Party or business trade unionism. Reassert the need to fight for pay.

**Preserve national class unity** in the face of the European Union and internal separatists working on their behalf. Assert workers' nationalism to ensure workers' control and unity. Resist the free flow of capital and the free movement of labour.

**Oppose the EU and NATO (USA) militarisation** of Britain and Europe and the drive towards war on a global scale. Identify and promote all forces and countries for peace against the USA drive for world domination by economic aggression, war and intervention. Promote mutual respect and economic ties between sovereign nations on the principles of non-interference and independence.

**Disseminate Marxist theory and practice** within the working class and wider labour movement. There is no advance to socialism without Marxism. Develop again our heritage of thinking to advance our work in and outside the workplace.

**Re-assert that there are only two classes in Britain** – those who exploit the labour of others (the capitalist class) and those who are exploited (the working class). Recruit to and build the party of the working class, the Communist Party of Britain Marxist Leninist.

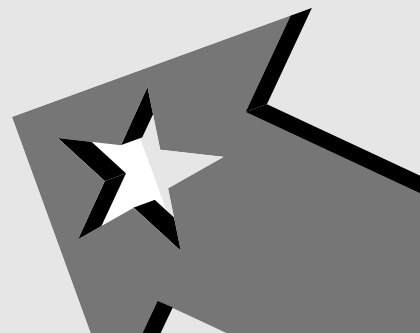
### Interested in these ideas?

- Go along to meetings in your part of the country, or join in study to help push forward the thinking of our class. Get in touch to find out how to take part.
- Subscribe to *Workers*, our bimonthly magazine, either online at [cpbml.org.uk](http://cpbml.org.uk) or by sending £12 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](http://www.cpbml.org.uk)

### CPBML

78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB

email [info@cpbml.org.uk](mailto:info@cpbml.org.uk)  
 twitter @cpbml  
[www.cpbml.org.uk](http://www.cpbml.org.uk)  
 phone 020 8801 9543





# Hands off Syria!

**'The military strikes by the US government and its allies against the Syrian Arab Republic are illegal acts of aggression, a step along the way to a lawless world.'**

LIKE ITS predecessors – the governments led by David Cameron and Tony Blair – our government has shown it is willing to allow British blood to be shed to back up US imperialism.

With an opinion poll indicating that only 22 per cent of people in Britain support military action against Syria, Theresa May ordered the RAF to launch strikes – pre-empting debate in parliament.

Many MPs – not just Labour but also Conservatives and others – are calling for a parliamentary vote. Now MPs need to be deluged with emails from their constituents telling them to vote to stop this war – and they need to make May accountable for her illegal actions.

The cabinet thinks it can get away with shunning parliament by calling on the so-called “royal prerogative”, a hangover from the days when the sovereign had absolute power. That would be outrageous.

But governments should rule in the national interest, and there is no national interest in military involvement in the Middle East. They should also operate within the law.

Under international law, there are only three justifications for military intervention in another country. The first is if the government there has asked for military help – which is clearly not the case in Syria. The second is in self-defence – also clearly not the case. The third is if the intervention is authorised by the UN Security Council, which has given no such authorisation for an attack on Syria.

So the military strikes by the US government and its allies against the Syrian Arab Republic are illegal acts of aggression, a step along the way to a lawless world.

Not that the US has shown much regard for law. For the past seven years, it has armed rebels/terrorists to overthrow the government of Syria – which is also illegal under international law.

The alleged use of chlorine gas by the Syrian government in Douma came within a week of US generals admitting that it had effectively won the war against ISIS, and of Trump announcing that US forces would soon be withdrawn.

Now all that has changed. And the only beneficiaries are ISIS and its allies – which makes it all the more unlikely that the Syrian government was involved.

With every day that passes, more doubt is being shed on the idea that the Syrian government was responsible for a gas attack – and even that a gas attack occurred at all.

An article in *The Independent* by veteran correspondent Robert Fisk relates a conversation with a doctor in Douma. While acknowledging that the video purporting to show a child overcome with gas was real, he said that what it showed was in fact the effects of oxygen starvation.

“I was with my family in the basement of my home three hundred metres from here on the night but all the doctors know what happened,” he said, continuing, “People began to arrive here suffering from hypoxia, oxygen loss. Then someone at the door, a ‘White Helmet’ shouted ‘Gas!’, and a panic began. People started throwing water over each other. Yes, the video was filmed here, it is genuine, but what you see are people suffering from hypoxia – not gas poisoning.”

For several days France claimed it had definitive evidence of a gas attack before changing its story and saying that definitive evidence might never be found.

In any case, the use of gas is no justification under international law for military action against another state. But to go to war on the basis of unconfirmed reports (initially posted on the web by a clearly pro-jihadi group) is the mark of leaders intent on sabotaging what by any standards is a great achievement by the Syrian government.

For the fact is that the jihadists in Syria are on the run, their hold on territory shrinking fast. Final victory against them is in sight. For the imperialist powers – the US, Britain and France – whose aim is to keep the Middle East in turmoil, that would be the ultimate humiliation.

The dangers of continued war are still huge. And the price will be paid above all by those in and near to the Middle East. US imperialism wants Europe to fight its wars. We must say no. ■

## Subscriptions

Take a regular copy of the bimonthly full-colour WORKERS. Six issues (one year) delivered direct to you costs £12 including postage.

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

Name

Address

Postcode

## BREXIT PAMPHLET

**Take Control** spells out clear red lines for independence from the EU and calls for the campaigning bodies left dormant after the referendum to be reactivated.

Download it for free at [cpbml.org.uk/redlines.pdf](http://cpbml.org.uk/redlines.pdf). Please share it with your friends, family and workmates. For free hard copies, please send a large stamped addressed envelope to CPBML, 78 Seymour Avenue, London N17 9EB.

If you would like the CPBML to hand out copies outside your workplace or college, or you would like to help us get the message out, email [info@cpbml.org.uk](mailto:info@cpbml.org.uk).

