

# Sunday Socialist

## INSIDE Free Assange Tory spin Gas price scam

### GREAT BRITISH ENERGY SCAM

- Labour's green energy plan will only profit investors
- This is not the Green New Deal we are looking for

**W**HEN Sir Keir Starmer announced Labour's plan to launch a publicly owned company which would supply the UK with clean power, and followed it up with online announcements stating it would "harness the power of Britain's sun, wind and waves to cut energy bills" he received a standing ovation during what was otherwise a lacklustre speech, after many heard "publicly owned" as "nationalise the energy sector".

Starmer's plan is not a radical shift in energy policy.. To be blunt, it's a con. Labour's proposal is all to do with investment and nothing to do with helping people with energy bills. Shadow Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds said the role of this 'Great British Energy' company will be the "management of investments". Which is probably why most of the business media is lauding it. It will not be supplying energy to anybody.

A Labour spokesman said: "This is not about nationalisation. It's about introducing a new player into the market that is able to ensure that we are putting every effort that we can into the drive for clean power, for renewables and nuclear." There, they said it out loud. But most didn't hear this, they just heard 'public ownership'. Cat Hobbs, director of campaigning group We Own It, heard it though, and said that while it is a step in the right direction, "We'd love to see a public supplier too, and the grid should also be working for people, not profit."

We would be remiss in not pointing out that under previous Labour governments the UK's share of fossil fuels was increased. Neither the Blair nor Brown governments made any attempt to boost renewables. They cut grants for household solar and wind installation and sought to weaken the renewables targets being drawn up by the European Commission. They also gave out enormous subsidies to the oil and gas industries, and to the coal firms.

So should we expect anything different from Blair's acolyte, Starmer? Short answer, no. He champions CCS, a technology with seemingly no purpose other than to funnel funds to oil companies and delay the transition from fossil fuels, and has dropped any commitment to his predecessor's extremely popular Green New Deal. Starmer says levying a windfall tax on the North Sea industries is "radical, bold and ambitious". Considering he has accepted a large donation from billionaire John Armitage whose fund holds more than \$300million in a Canadian private energy company it is not a huge leap to believe that he will never stand up to oil and gas companies, it is up to us to do that.



What activists thought they were getting

# TORIES SPIN OUT OF CONTROL



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IMAGE; <https://www.needpix.com/photo/1410367/fractal-3d-spinning-top-toy-gradient-blue-conical-spin>

**T**HE Government’s announcement of the plan to cut the 45p tax rate for top earners brought audible gasps of horror from half the nation as some came to realise what many of us have known for some time – that the Tories care not one iota for those less fortunate than themselves.

However, just ten days later, the plan, which caused the market to crash and the pound to drop to its lowest ever level against the US dollar, has been dropped. Yesterday the government announced the U-turn with Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng having to deliver a hastily revised speech to conference. And now the government is desperately searching for a scapegoat to blame the embarrassing change on, with the Chancellor claiming the tax rate had become a ‘distraction’ from the overall Growth Plan, and suggesting it was a sign of “humility and contrition” that the government was willing to change its mind over this.

Meanwhile, our hapless PM is blaming the chancellor. When she was asked on Sunday if the whole cabinet had been consulted before the decision to cut the tax was taken, Truss said: “No, no we didn’t. It was a decision that the Chancellor made.” Nadine Dorries was, unsurprisingly, critical of Truss, saying she has “thrown her own Chancellor under the bus”. According to Paddy Power, it is now 7/1 that Mr Kwarteng will no longer be chancellor by the end of the year.

Labour’s Rachel Reeves accused the Tories of being “completely out of touch”. We don’t disagree with her overall assessment . “This is an economic crisis made in Downing Street, paid for by working people.” Despite Labour’s current healthy lead in the polls, currently around 45-50% it is not clear that those same working people are overly inspired by Labour. Whilst polls give Labour up to 50% of the vote and on course for a 56-seat majority, this is mainly a feature of Tory voters remaining undecided as we pointed out in our recent analysis. Enough to win, definitely, but not if undecided Tories suddenly decide to return to the fold.

Tory Party chairman, Jake Berry, made clear his party’s disdain for ordinary people when he stated on Sky News that those unhappy about fuel bills can either cut consumption or go out and get a higher paid job. It’s worth noting that Mr Berry earns £3,500 per month on top of his MPs salary. It really is time these second jobs for MPs were stopped.

While the U-turn is a welcome sign it is one tax reversal, the rest of the mini-budget remains intact. The planned benefit cuts have not been taken off the agenda. We mustn’t be fooled into thinking the Tories are done with harming us. History has taught us this is not the case.

## WORLD CAPITALISM IN CRISIS



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*Original image: <https://www.needpix.com/photo/642368/>*

**T**HE pound has bounced back against the dollar. It is now worth what it was before Kwasi Kwarteng's 'fiscal event' rocked the markets 12 days ago. And share prices are going up as well. Hooray! Time to break out the champagne? Well not quite.

The pound is still 20% lower than it was last year. Which is bad news for the cost of all those items that are priced in dollars, like oil. And the cost of all those items that are affected by the price of oil, which is just about everything else.

What really happened with the mini budget was that it made things that have been going badly get suddenly worse. So the headline news was the £65 billion the Bank of England had to find to rescue the pension industry. But for many pensioners it came too late. If you are getting close to retirement your pension fund will have put your money in low-risk investments like government bonds instead of stocks and shares.

But the rise in interest rates has been driving down the value of government bonds. Some have declined by 40% this year, with 16% of that coming since the mini budget. Scottish Widows have a £1 billion 'pension protector' fund that has suffered heavy losses. So, many people who were planning to retire soon may have to choose between taking a lower pension or carrying on at work in the hope that their fund recovers.

Truss and Kwarteng ask us to pin our hopes on economic recovery. But production has been declining for three months and we may already be in recession. The Tories have made things worse and are being punished at the polls. But it is hard to see how a Starmer government could make things better.

Capitalism is in crisis. The USA is raising interest rates to protect big business in America. This has a knock-on effect around the world. Australia has just raised its interest rates. Countries in South East Asia are spending their reserves to prop up their currencies against the dollar. Even the Euro, backed by the European Central Bank, is struggling to maintain parity against the dollar.

We may be on the brink of a worldwide recession that would mean economic decline and poverty for wealthy nations and absolute destitution and starvation in the poorest nations. There is no national solution and competing world powers are incapable of coming together to find an international solution. We need a movement that challenges Capitalism, instead of appeasing it. While centrists shriek, Socialism has the answer.

## America Adds to the Woes of the World



When America sneezes, the world catches a cold

National Archives at College Park, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

[Read online](#)

**WHEN** the American Bureau of Labor publishes its employment statistics later today it will have far reaching consequences for the rest of the world. The US Federal Reserve has been leading the way on interest rate rises this year in an attempt to curb inflation after the US economy bounced back strongly in the wake of COVID.

If unemployment figures are going up it is a sign that their policy is working. Last month, when the central bank opted to impose another large rate increase, Chair Jerome Powell acknowledged that rate hikes are likely to fuel a rise in layoffs but said *“that is something that we think we need to have”*.

### America

Others in America disagree. Mike Mitchell, director of policy and research at the Groundwork Collaborative, voiced his disagreement in a statement [yesterday](#).

*“Continuing down this path risks leaving millions of people, disproportionately lower-wage workers and workers of color, without a job or with smaller paychecks... We urge Chair Powell to think twice before plunging our economy into a wholly avoidable recession and completely undoing one of the strongest job recoveries on record.”*

And there’s the rub. The law of the market and supply and demand are all very well when they are pushing up commodity prices and profits. Until the commodity is labour power and its price is measured in higher wages.

Truss and Kwarteng can pursue right wing economic ideology and only the UK suffers. But America dominates the world economy. It is the heart of the beast and decisions made in Washington affect us just as much as Tory policies.

If the Federal Reserve decides that not enough Americans are suffering and opts for higher interest rates the UK will likely have to follow suit. That will turn the screw on prices here, increase the pressure on pension funds and threaten a housing market that is already badly shaken.

### Growth Growth Growth

Truss wants Growth, Growth, Growth. But the only things that will be growing are unemployment, inflation and homelessness. Even if the USA eases up on interest rates the UK is still in trouble. Deutsche Bank predicts that there will be no growth in the UK economy until 2024. The IMF issued another condemnation of ‘Trussonomics’ yesterday. They don’t think cutting taxes works at the same time as interest rates are rising. But true to their capitalist loyalties the IMF opposes price controls while advocating policies that increase unemployment and depress wages.

That is why we say, ‘Enough is Enough’. Of course, we have had enough of the Tories. But unless we are happy to settle for more or less the same from a Starmer government we need to build a movement that says we have had enough of capitalism.

## FINNISH NURSES SHOW THE WAY



*Image: Tehyn ja Superin mielenilmaus Helsingissä 16.9.2022 "Ei pakkotyölaille!" via Wikimedia Commons*

**Nurses rally in support of their unions**

[Read online](#)

**N**URSES in Finland have ended their eight-month old dispute after their employers agreed a pay deal worth between 13 and 17 per cent. The employers revised their offer when intensive care nurses threatened to walk out. This was met with an injunction. At this point the nurses began organising a mass resignation.

The Finnish Union of Practical Nurses (Super) and Union of Health and Social Care Professionals (Tehy), announced five limited strikes in intensive care units and home care, to begin in September. This led to the employers asking the courts to outlaw strikes completely. The court dutifully complied providing the Local and County Government Employers (KT) injunctions, complete with one million euro penalty fines for each strike for both unions.

The background to this dispute, as with many disputes across the health sector throughout Europe (and beyond), is that, whilst lauding them during the worst phase of the Covid pandemic, governments have been slower to turn hand claps into pay rises. Indeed, Aki Lindén, Finland's Social Democratic Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services, continued to push forward the Patient Safety Act which would restrict the right to strike in the health care sector in cases where the life of patients is in danger whilst the dispute was ongoing. Linden, incidentally, has spent a large part of his career as a CEO of health care districts, which are the nurses' employers.

### Harmonisation

Healthcare in Finland is publicly funded by taxes and social security payments. However, while the government-level initiatives focus on health promotion and social welfare policies, the healthcare system is highly decentralised, and individual municipalities (local governments) organise and deliver the actual healthcare to Finland's residents. It is this which has led to nurses who do similar jobs being paid different rates.

Although healthcare is publicly funded, it is not free at the point of use. For example, a GP's visit can cost up to €20,60.

According to KT the agreement includes details of the harmonisation, but Millariikka Rytönen, the chairperson of Tehy, argued that: "Wage harmonisation can't be carried out at this table, and anyone who has the slightest understanding of the law knows that". In other words, whilst the dispute has formally ended, the disputation goes on.

### Finland's political landscape

Finland's government, elected in March 2022, is a coalition of the the Social Democratic Party (which has its roots in the Finnish trade union movement), the Centre Party (which has been variously described as "social liberal", "conservative liberal" and "liberal conservative"), the Green League, the Left Alliance and the Swedish People's Party. Of the five government parties, only the Left Alliance was in favour of extra spending to boost salaries for the nurses.

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# General Election campaign starts early

**T**he Tory Party conference which finished this week in Birmingham told us one thing. Unless they ditch Liz Truss, they are about to hand a General Election victory to Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party. Whilst many will be cock-a-hoop at this prospect, we have to ask if Labour represent a great leap forward or simply a rightward lurching holding operation.

The numbers certainly look promising, from a Labour perspective, with the latest Survation survey giving Labour an election winning margin. Many of these voters will, of course, be reluctant socialists on a singular mission to 'get the Tories out'.

Whilst the Tories are currently on 24%, closer analysis reveals that this low figure is largely due to the 2 million or so Tory voters who remain undecided. To be fair to Labour, the strategy of believing in nothing, and doing even less, is paying off as, based on these figures, they are now in 1997 territory.

Turnout may in the end be the key determinant of who gets the keys to Number Ten. It is often forgotten, especially by Blair's apologists (who, quite understandably, appear to have very selective memories) that, in the elections following the '97 landslide, Labour lost nearly 4 million votes. But the most interesting fact is that, contrary to what the Blairites like to pretend, their election victories in 2001 and 2005 were a result of Tory voters abstaining, and this leading to historically low levels of turnout. Sir Keir's electoral strategy seems to be to convince voters, once again, that there really is no difference between the parties. It may work.

From a Tory perspective, it is absolutely clear that the hapless Truss is a liability. The question is will they wait two years to oust her or will those many backbenchers on course to lose seats they only gained in 2019 revolt first and force a leadership election? Labour will hope that it is the former. Though whoever takes over (and whenever they do so) one thing is sure. - The recession is not going to disappear.

Socialists know that the possibility of winning real power through the ballot box under a system rigged in favour of bosses and big business is remote. However, a victory for a party of the left or a party led by a left-wing leader, as in 2019, could shift the political landscape in ways which, whilst not heralding revolutionary change, can make the living conditions of ordinary people so much better.

In many ways elections have always been and remain the lowest level of politics for class conscious activists wanting real change. It is essential that at times like these we keep a clear head and do not get sucked into the electoral whirlwind which is starting to build up already. Voting for a party where there is mutual loathing is not a good moral choice just because you also loathe the other lot.

We can almost guarantee that, the closer we get to election day, trade unions and those in poverty will be pressurised to put all their eggs into a Labour government basket. This would be a mistake. The capitalist class will not have a ceasefire because there is an impending election, neither will the markets. We must not either. Now is not the time to soften our approach. We need a robust challenge to whichever cronies of capital get elected in 2024. But even before then we need to keep the pressure on both trade unions and MPs, letting them know in no uncertain terms we are no longer prepared to pay for their crises.

## Blackouts and more price rises ahead



Photo <https://www.needpix.com/photo/1191797/>

COST OF LIVING CRISIS

**T**his week the National Grid, announced that it was possible that there could be power cuts in the months ahead. Whilst this was a ‘worst case scenario’ given the record of this government who would bet on it not being the case.

According to the National Grid it is likely that throughout the winter consumers - that’s you and me - could face regular 3-hour power blackouts in order to conserve supplies. Whilst power cuts may just be an inconvenience it is worth asking how a country considered the world’s 5th largest economy is having to act like a Third World dictatorship.

The Government have conveniently, and somewhat disingenuously, blamed the war in Ukraine. The war, so we are being led to believe, has pushed up the price of gas and this has led to a rise in consumer prices. But the actual rise in prices began in July 2020, eight months before that war began. And, according to the [Huffington Post](#), in the first three months of the war Europe bought more gas from Russia.

The U.K. has always been a net importer of gas despite having its own gas fields. We produce around 40 billion cubic units (BCU) of gas each year, but use 80 BCU. You don’t need a calculator to work out that we have to import half our gas. Only a tiny proportion of that gas comes from Russia, the vast bulk of our imports come from Europe’s biggest exporter of natural gas, [Norway](#). In 2017 Centrica, the parent company of British Gas decided to close The Rough storage facility, which had provided 70% of the UK gas storage capacity for more than 30 years following a government decision not to subsidise the costly maintenance and upgrades needed to keep the site going. Without that facility we were particularly vulnerable to market shifts such as the one we are seeing now.

When the wholesale price of a commodity such as gas goes up the energy companies quickly raise their prices in order to avoid the cost falling on them. However when the price goes down the same companies do not reduce their prices but instead increase their profits. All of the main energy companies are seeing massive increases in profits as you and I struggle to pay our bills. It is one of the most blatant cases of profiteering you will see. Yet the government who could do something about this have sat back and said that whilst you huddle in your sleeping bags in front of the TV, which you may not be able to watch due to the blackout, it is fine for companies, in which some of them have shares, to continue to rake up record profits.

The government have a duty to protect you from scammers but when they are in on the scam that is unlikely to happen. If you think the answer is a change of government, think again. It’s not a change of government but a change in the whole system of governing that is needed.



### **23 children killed in gun and knife attack**

ON Thursday 23 children were killed in a gun and knife attack at a childcare centre in Thailand's north-east when a former policeman stormed the building, killing children as young as two while they slept, leaving at least 37 people dead. More than 90 children usually attend the centre but because of poor weather and a bus breakdown only 24 of them were there on Thursday. Only one child has survived. The attacker killed his wife and his step-son, before killing himself after a manhunt.

### **Energy is secure, says Downing Street**

While most are understandably concerned about energy costs and trying to find ways to cut back usage, a source has told the BBC that the government has decided not to launch a public information campaign on reducing energy use this winter after the prime minister's office raised objections. Climate Minister Graham Stuart however, has denied that a campaign had been blocked by Downing Street. and said that UK energy was secure despite a National Grid warning of blackouts. That'll come as a relief to all those of us who totally trust the government.

### **Covid on the rise again**

Covid is on the rise again in the UK and people who feel unwell are being advised by NHS England to avoid vulnerable friends, colleagues and relatives as a precaution, say experts. There are no new restrictions, but people are being reminded to take extra care and protect the elderly. Those who qualify for free jabs should get them. Data suggests 1.3 million or one in 50 has Covid.

### **Ebola outbreak in Uganda**

As we struggle with Covid, in Uganda 29 people have died from an Ebola outbreak, among them four health workers. Vaccines which successfully curbed outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are not effective against the Sudan virus and those working on the front line are very worried.

### **Officers under investigation**

Six serving police officers and a former officer are under investigation over 'discriminatory' and 'derogatory' messages shared in a WhatsApp group. They are being investigated for offences under the Communications Act after allegedly sending 'grossly offensive messages' the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) said. The watchdog said it had identified a "significant number" of messages of a "discriminatory, derogatory or pornographic nature" shared within the group. All seven are also under investigation for potential gross misconduct, the IOPC said. The matter could be referred to the Crown Prosecution Service, whose role it will be to determine whether criminal charges should be brought.

# OUR ROUND-UP FROM TRADE UNIONS

Compiled by Teodora Hansen

## Dockers Strike Over Pay

FELIXSTOWE, the UK's largest container port, came to a standstill this week after members of [Unite](#), the UK's biggest union, walked out for a second 8-day strike. The workers voted 92 per cent in favour for industrial action on an 81 per cent turnout. The dispute is a result of the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company offering a pay increase of just five per cent to its workers. This is an effective pay cut with the real (RPI) rate of inflation currently standing at 11.9 per cent. Last year the workforce received a below inflation pay increase of 1.4 per cent.

## NHS Winter of Discontent Brewing

Workers in [NHS Scotland](#) are being balloted on strike action. The ballot will include the entire Scottish Ambulance Service membership including paramedics and call handlers. Radiographers will also be balloted across NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde except those directly involved in cancer care provision at the Beatson and Breast Screening as part of measures to protect the service in the event of any industrial action.

A strike among NHS workers in Wales could be on the cards as, [Unite](#), confirms that it will begin the formal process of balloting its members on industrial action. The move follows the results of a consultative ballot in which Unite's NHS Wales members voted overwhelmingly in favour of industrial action in what the union says is 'an emphatic rejection' of the recently imposed pay deal. 70 per cent of Unite NHS Wales members voted for strike action with 89 per cent voting for action short of a strike. Turnout in this ballot exceeded that of all previous ballots, which Unite say illustrates the immense strength of feeling among NHS Wales workers.

[North East Ambulance Service](#) faces a strike vote as GMB Union launches a formal industrial action ballot. GMB has almost 750 NEAS Paramedics and ambulance workers, who are angry over the Government's imposed 4 per cent pay award, which leaves them facing yet another massive real terms pay cut.

The [Royal College of Nursing](#) is balloting its UK members for strike action. From Thursday 6 October to 12 noon on Wednesday 2 November, RCN members working in the NHS and HSC on Agenda for Change contracts are being balloted on whether to take strike action. This follows the below-inflation pay award in England and Wales and pay offer in Scotland. There has been no award made in Northern Ireland at this time.

## FBU recommend rejecting 5% pay offer

Firefighters and firefighter control staff have received a revised 5% pay offer from fire employers. The [FBU's executive council](#) has recommended that the offer is rejected. A consultative ballot of FBU members on the offer will now take place.

## Amazon workers strike over pay and conditions

[Amazon](#) workers hold impromptu strike after a major fire at their Staten Island warehouse. At least 100 employees are demanding paid time off for the night. Workers at the warehouse voted to form a union earlier this year. Amazon has contested the results of the election.

## Network Rail admit that they are demanding a pay cut

Negotiations in the [RMT's](#) ongoing dispute have failed to make progress. Network rail have not improved on an offer of 4% this year at a time when RPI inflation is running at 12.3%. Even Network Rail boss Andrew Haines has admitted that in real terms this is a pay cut. Massive cuts to maintenance jobs and schedules are planned.

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## SHOULD THE LEFT JOIN THE GREENS?

The answer is yes, they should, however it all depends on the terms.

Labour offered the Greens a ‘special relationship’ some years ago that only went one, meaning their way. This didn’t work since it was mostly interpreted as us standing down to protect their vote.

The wider left movement can and often do work together, in my hometown of Stoke-on-Trent we work with the SWP and other left aligned groups.

What we need is a voting system, PR, that would allow a progressive, socialist, and environmentally aware bloc of parties work in coalition to challenge the status quo on social justice and climate change.

No prizes for guessing which party formerly of the left declined to back PR at its conference this year, despite strong support from grassroots members. Full disclosure, I am an active member of the Green Party. **Adam Colclough**

The first thing to stop is using the collective term “The Left.” That’s a shorthand the media use. They have been shifting the Overton window towards normalising right-wing ideology as “normal,” thus painting anyone with an ounce of compassion as being unstable deviants. The politics of image.

The next thing to consider is who is in the Green Party right now. If you look, you will see centrists, driven to the Greens by their utter failure to gain traction during the 2019 elections. The same centrists who aided the sabotage of Labour, and then defected to form “funny tinge” parties which embraced Newspeak and dog-whistle racism as policy.

So if left-leaning Labour refugees want to join the Greens, be aware there may be resistance from the entrenched and resentful tinge squad, and another fight on their hands

**Alex Greene**

I’d say no. Why? Because you’d risk repeating what we’ve had in Labour many times before: a divided party, more at war with itself than with either the polluting corporations or the neoliberal Right.

There’d be accusations of entryism, arguments over the fundamental objectives of the Party, disagreements on strategy, resentment, friction et cetera ad nauseam.

What should we do instead? That’s a much harder question – and one I’m hoping to address in my next article for Critical Mass: ‘Can The Left Unite?’ **Luke Andreski**

I will answer with more questions.

Do the Greens understand that the fight for climate change is a fight against capitalism? Yes! Then join them and work out the best way to defeat capitalism. No! Then why join them?

Potential answers:

To win the Greens over to anti-capitalism. To identify socialists in the Greens and work together to push the eco-socialist agenda.

Potential difficulties.

You will become involved in the daily grind of canvassing and winning votes for the Greens’ current agenda while operating as an internal left opposition. We have a hundred years’ experience of that in the Labour Party. Not a good omen. I will not be joining any party at the moment. I support trade union activity, protest movements and single-issue campaigns. But I think we need a much greater degree of militancy and class struggle to create the conditions to launch a new socialist party. **Mike Stanton**

**Next week’s question: Peace or victory in Ukraine? Send your answers (no more than 100 words) to:**

**[edgenotes@creatingsocialism.org](mailto:edgenotes@creatingsocialism.org)**

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# There may be trouble ahead

## New government anti-union legislation

*Marilyn Tyzack*

[Read online](#)



### The 2022 summer of discontent

THROUGHOUT the summer there has been a fightback by trade unions and levels of unrest not seen for decades. Workers in many sectors have started to make it clear that they will not be the sacrificial lambs for this current crisis in the way they were under Osborne's neoliberal austerity agenda. The scars of that disastrous project are still evident. Rough sleeping in England has increased 165% from 2010, life expectancy has stalled for the first time in more than 100 years, and the number of people in poverty in working families reached a record high.

We are now in the middle of another crisis, but this time people are angry. This crisis has become a living nightmare for millions of working people who have seen their wages fall at a record rate, while their bills increase exponentially. This time though, more are aware of the inequality and have had enough. They can see that corporations are making record profits, while they are being told to rein in their wage demands and choose whether to heat or eat.

Trade union leaders are now using their voices and spelling out in very simple terms the injustice of a system where Shell can quadruple its bills while increasing the income paid to shareholders from \$3.4bn in 2021 to \$18bn in 2022. At the same time, Royal Mail bosses plead poverty while making £758 million profit last year, and the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company, owned by the Hong Kong-based conglomerate CK Hutchison Holdings, owner of the Three mobile phone network and Superdrug, made a pre-tax profit of almost £61million in 2020, while offering their workers a 5% wage increase, way below the rate of inflation.

### Imbalance of power

So the fact that the Government is resorting to yet more anti-union legislation is perhaps an indication that the rebalancing of the economy that they want is one where ordinary people take the pain, so they can have the gain.

However, the enormous struggles workers have faced throughout history, in order to be

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treated fairly, have certainly not taken place on a level playing field. Put very simply, there has been, and always will be, a power imbalance between capital and labour under capitalism.

This balance alters, dependant on the industry, economic climate, and the will to resist, but the balance of power has never been equal.

Trade union legislation pivotal in enforcing power

The role of trade union legislation has been a pivotal backdrop in enforcing this unequal power relationship. There has been a clear pattern of massive fightbacks, successful disputes, and rights being enforced by legislation, only to have these watered down or removed at some future date by the implementation of anti-union laws to ensure that any power gained is clawed back.

This pattern has been clear from the earliest days of trade unionism where people were hanged or transported simply for wanting the right to organise with their workmates. The implementation of the Trade Union Act of 1871, which legalised trade unions for the first time and protected union funds, was only achieved by the enormous sacrifices of ordinary men and women.

Having legalised trade unions, the Government then attempted to water down the impact by introducing the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1871, which deemed peaceful attempts by workers to encourage strikes to be seen as 'coercion' and a criminal offence. Employers, of course, had no restrictions on what they could do. Judges generally interpreted whatever unions did as a breach.

Six Acts of anti-union legislation

This has been an ongoing pattern. Between 1980 and 1993, Conservative governments passed six acts of Parliament, starting with the Employment Act 1980, to restrict unions' power to go on strike. Picketing was restricted. Solidarity strikes were outlawed.

The United Kingdom has, in consequence, the most restrictive anti-union laws in Europe.

David Renton, <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2022/06/trade-union-laws-rmt-strike-industrial-relations-legislation/> writing in Tribune, is of the view that "almost all the things which socialists find contemptible about contemporary Britain – the ever-accelerating disparity of wealth between rich and poor, the power of the police, the powerlessness of protestors to successfully challenge the state – can be traced back to the industrial and political defeat of the 1980s".

So, nearly 150 years later, from legislation that legalised trade unions, and just over 40 years after a Tory government weakened the protection given, we see the same tactics being used by yet another Tory government to undermine the unions and support the already powerful employers. And Labour, which did nothing to remove that legislation during 15 years of government is busy distancing itself from unions at the very time unity across the labour movement is most needed.

Liz Truss Government to introduce further anti-union legislation

The Government has announced that it will introduce legislation that will allow employers to use agency staff to take over the duties of striking workers. At present this is unlawful.

The new Liz Truss Government has also promised a further crackdown to further hinder industrial action.

These include:

- Imposing minimum service levels in transport and other 'critical' sectors. Ministers have suggested these will include power, education and the health service
- Banning strikes by different unions in the same workplace within a set period
- Limiting the number of pickets
- Imposing cooling off periods after each strike lasting 60 days
- Increasing the notice period from two weeks to four.

The TUC has responded by making a submission to the ILO Committee of experts <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/tuc-submission-ilo-committee-experts> by pointing out that "Unions in the UK are highly regulated to an extent that they believe infringes the right to association and the right to organise under ILO Conventions 87 and 98."

## Lessons from the past

Submissions and parliamentary questions are all well and good but reduces you and me to spectators on the sidelines. Whilst those in power would like the history of working-class resistance to be buried in the past, it is important to remember what has and can be achieved by collective action.

Indeed, after the end of the First World War, from 1918 until 1921, the country saw the most prolonged phase of union militancy and class confrontation ever experienced in Britain – union membership rose to 8.5 million. A key dispute of the period was the 1919 miners' strike in South Wales, Nottinghamshire, and Derbyshire, demanding a 30% wage increase, a six-hour working day and the nationalisation of the mines. However, when leaders of the unions became aware that the strength of this alliance could cause a constitutional crisis, the unions backed down. As Robert Smilie, <https://spartacus-educational.com/TUsmillie.htm> the leader of the miners, reflected, "From that moment on we were beaten and we knew we were".

This experience was reflected in the General Strike of 1926, which is viewed by Kevin Morgan of Manchester University "as one of the outstanding events of twentieth century British history." [https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/173655652/Morgan\\_colourless\\_dry\\_and\\_dull.pdf](https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk/portal/files/173655652/Morgan_colourless_dry_and_dull.pdf) All accounts agree that the discipline and solidarity shown were remarkable. However, again, the TUC reached a settlement with the Government that ended the General Strike, and miners were left to fight, and lose, alone.



**"There is no final victory, as there is no final defeat. There is just the same battle. To be fought, over and over again." Tony Benn**

*Image: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

## 1978-1979 Winter of Discontent

More recently, this current round of action is reminiscent of the Winter of Discontent. Between November 1978 and February 1979, huge numbers of public and private sector workers were involved in widespread strikes in an attempt to obtain cost-of-living pay rises, against a backdrop of around 13% inflation.

The unrest had deeper causes than resentment of the caps on pay rises introduced by the then Labour government. Labour's internal divisions over its commitment to social democracy, manifested in disputes over labour law reform and macroeconomic strategy during the 1960s and early 1970s, pitted constituency members against the party's establishment. Many of the strikes were initiated at the local level, with national union leaders largely unable to stop them. Union membership, particularly in the public sector, had become more female and less white, and the growth of the public sector unions had not brought them a commensurate share of power within the TUC.

It is, therefore, too simplistic to refer to the imbalance of power between unions, employers, and the state, without recognising the gradations in power between union members (the craft and general unions) and the controversial role played by some trade unions in controlling their membership. Even Churchill remarked, "The curse of trade unionism is that there is not enough of it". <http://isj.org.uk/learning-the-lessons-of-the-past>

History has shown us that there comes a point when working people will no longer accept having to bear the brunt of a crisis caused by capitalism. Draconian legislation is there to prevent workers from demanding a fair share of the profit made by their labour. Trade unions do not just need strong leaders, such as Mick Lynch and Sharon Graham, they need grassroots organisation capable of leading the struggle to defend their livelihoods.

The lessons of the past are that challenging an entire system designed to reward the few and keep the many in their place requires courage and organisation. There is certainly a need for radical and courageous trade unions, but, just as importantly they need to work alongside and support grassroots organisations. Only in this way will they be able to shift that power imbalance back towards working people.

## **Mrs Thatcher and the UK Economy**

K

It is often claimed that Mrs Thatcher did great things for the UK economy in the 1980's with the radical measures her government introduced. However, at around the same time as these measures came into effect North Sea oil came on stream. To paraphrase Neil Kinnock, this was like winning the lottery twice over for the UK. The price of oil, already not cheap, doubled almost overnight. Without that things would probably have turned out very differently for Mrs Thatcher and the country.

G

A

Brendan O'Brien

B

### **Capitalism is failing**

D

For the most part capitalism is a failing but global economic model, therefore I think the only way to fight it is through the ongoing international crisis leading to a major economic upheaval.

E

Lynne Edwards (via Comments page)

E

### **Confusing article?**

**(on Ray Woolford's Solidarity Not Charity)**

F

Very confusing article. Not at all clear what his perspective on charity was.

Robin Burgess (via feedback form)

### **How to misunderstand socialism and liberalism**

I prefer liberalism to socialism which is a form of control and liberalism makes people happier.

manish cjhes (via feedback form)

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## Luke Andreski responds

Hi Stephen, Thank you for your thoughtful response to my article – which I think very cleverly challenges an important characteristic of the article, namely, that while I critique simplification, describing the solutions of the Right as ‘so simple they’re stupid’, I nevertheless make use of simplification in developing my argument. As you suggest, it is very unlikely that the disunity of the Left, or between progressives, centrists and liberals, can be easily put down to one cause. I would suggest that the complexity and diversity of answers that intelligent people come up with are a powerful causative factor in generating factional conflict, and your examples seem to me to support rather than conflict with this claim. Intelligent and complex people, in approaching our complex world, are quite capable of reaching conclusions which, for example, support the Palestinian struggle but take opposing views on Syria, or which mutually dislike US geopolitical machinations, but disagree about NATO.

These are paradigm cases of how, in the face of complexity, intelligent people come up with complex answers which may disagree at any of an immense number of decision points. No wonder conflict and friction come into play! But you are absolutely right that people adopt positions not solely for intellectual reasons but for emotional, psychological and social reasons too. We all like to think we are rational beings, but tribalism, temperament and our broader social backgrounds make certain kinds of arguments or positions more attractive to us than others. And then, having adopted a position, no matter how rationally, we all tend to hunker down, resisting and disputing all alternative viewpoints (often with greater bitterness against those who ‘almost agree with us’, because ‘surely they should know better!’). So I’d agree that the picture is rather more complex than my article immediately suggests – but I hope that through this act of simplification I’ve been able to highlight a compelling source of discord which moves us a little way forward in understanding the critique of left-wing ‘infighting’. One last point (which perhaps only serves to support my overall drift): I’m afraid I have to disagree with your suggestion that Jonathan Cook is authoritarian in contrast to Monbiot being liberal. I suspect that critics of US interference across the globe are equally critical of Russian or Chinese interference, and that the contrast is more one of pacifism vs interventionism than of authoritarianism vs liberalism. Cook appears to me to be against wars of intervention by any nation, whether it be the US, Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, Israel or the UK, whereas Monbiot has always been broadly supportive of military interventions by the West, and appears very willing to adopt a warlike approach to the West’s defined ‘enemies’. Like Cook, my own position is one of pacifism. I loathe Russian aggression, but I am also alert to the hypocrisy of the UK and the US and believe there are always better solutions than initiating or perpetuating war.

## Dave Middleton responds

Thank you to those who took the trouble to comment. I want to agree entirely with Glenn Holmes A survey on something like a public figure death is more likely to increase emotion than measure it. As to Maggie Bennett’s point that the question had pre-filtered those who said no, that is not likely in this case. We know from the survey results that 56% said they did not have that response. You are right however, Maggie, to be suspicious of the way polling companies filter respondents. Finally, Geof Hughes says YouGov is Tory backed. I am not quite sure what that means. It’s founder was a former Tory MP, but as far as I know, it has no official affiliation to the Tory Party. I know many people who work for statistical organisations and whilst the organisations management may well be Tory (most managements in most industries are) those who do the work tend to be, broadly speaking, on the left.

We welcome your responses to what you read in Critical Mass and the Sunday Socialist. You can leave a comment on the bottom of posts, or use the contact us form to tell us what you think.

**Or email: [editor@creatingsocialism.org](mailto:editor@creatingsocialism.org)**

Articles that appear in the Opinion section of Critical Mass Sunday Socialist represent the views of the author and not necessarily those of Critical Mass.

# Solidarity not charity #solidaritynotcharity and how the misery of poverty and disability is making far too many rich

Ray Barron-Woolford

[Read online](#)



**F**ORMER Labour Prime Minister [Gordon Brown](#) wrote recently: “Charities are having to stop feeding the hungry so they can help the starving.”

The staggering increase in the cost of food and energy has put enormous strains on frontline charities and, as demand increases, this cost-of-living crisis could end up being of biblical proportions. Without urgent financial help from national or local government, many of these charities will go under. And when they are gone where will the people who rely on them go? As [Gordon Brown](#) also wrote in the Guardian:

“For the first time since the Welfare State was created, the food bank will be our safety net, and charity our last line of defence.”

Poverty is now big business, a profit-making opportunity that simply should not exist in the sixth richest economy in the world. Because this ‘industry’ provides careers and salaries, there has been no political support for my campaign through The Kath Duncan Equality and Civil Rights Network for both national and local governments to appoint a minister for poverty to ensure that every policy makes a real contribution to eradicating poverty in all its forms.

While I was doing research for my book [Food Bank Britain](#), I was shocked to discover that, according to the highly respected [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#), poverty costs this country a staggering £78 billion a year.

So, how are people getting rich from the poor? Today you can buy a foodbank [franchise](#) for about £1,500 a year, and many independent food banks, which were not part of a corporate third sector group, now find themselves having to sign over their income generation to companies which will source foods at wholesale prices and deliver them direct to food bank shelves. These companies make their profits by charging a membership or licence fee, or even taking a cut of the food bank’s entire income.

Supermarkets prefer to deal with these large new profit-making companies and across the UK they have stopped allowing local independent food banks to collect either surplus food or food donated by customers in-store. Independent food banks and community

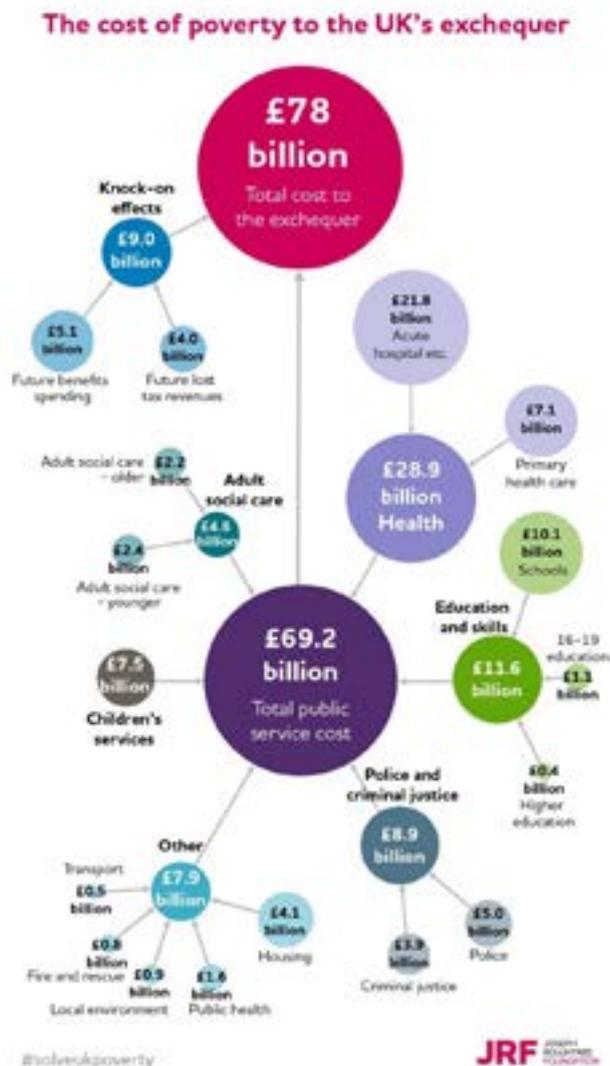
food projects are closing because without these donations they cannot afford to carry on. They do not have the cash reserves to cope with soaring food and energy price rises without substantial help and support from national and local government.

A career in the charity sector can certainly be very lucrative for some. David Miliband is paid £700,000 a year as the chief executive of the [International Rescue Committee](#). Meanwhile, refugees with real skills and eagerness to work are exploited by temporary housing providers and hotels in what amounts to a scam that costs millions a year. A quick and obvious solution would be to allow refugees and asylum seekers to work and end this exploitation by those who profit from their misery.

But it's not just refugees who are seen as a get-rich-quick opportunity. In my borough of Lewisham, the council pays one private provider a staggering £3,000 a month per resident for vulnerable people whom the council has a legal obligation to house. This was confirmed by a person I was helping at the We Care Food Bank advice surgery last week. He is living in squalid conditions in one house with 22 other people. Like him they are all officially vulnerable because of poor mental health, and the council is being charged £3,000 per person per month by a landlord who provides no onsite staffing of any kind and certainly no specialist mental health support.

Such outsourcing to private companies is bad, both for the people who need to be looked after, who generally enjoy an appalling level of 'care,' and for local council taxpayers, who pay through the nose for such shoddy service. Many private housing providers have worked out that, if you claim to specialise in housing a specific vulnerable group, such as refugees, children, or people with disabilities, the profits you can make are off the scale.

How is this allowed? In part it is a lack of vision and leadership in our local government, which seems gripped by deadly inertia and unable to make the necessary decisions and investments. If the council were properly to investigate the case I have just mentioned, and found that these people, who are officially in their care, are being cruelly exploited and that we, as taxpayers, are being scammed, they would have to rehouse the 500-plus residents currently in the 'care' of this housing business but, because of chronic lack of investment in public housing, they



simply could not do this.

It's not just the disabled, refugees, children, women fleeing domestic violence and the hungry who are increasingly seen as profit-making opportunities. The 'homeless sector' has been a disgrace for at least a generation, in part because far too many, who actually know better, nevertheless depend on the continuation of homelessness for their careers and income. In every town in Britain, there are empty buildings that could be handed over to not-for-profit grassroots charities, run on fresh air and the kindness of strangers, which could end homelessness in a matter of days if they received the proper help and support.

Many of you reading this will be unaware that the leading housing charity in Britain, [SHELTER](#), has NEVER housed a single homeless person, its work essentially consists of lobbying and giving advice and support over the phone. In Britain today, more people work in the homeless sector than the people who are officially homeless (approx. 280,000), so there is clearly zero incentive to erase this misery that costs us all millions of pounds.

In 2022, poverty is something this country cannot afford, but our new Prime Minister does not seem to understand this. Her solution to the cost-of-living crisis is a borrowing frenzy not seen since WW2 and tax cuts that will boost the income and wealth of those who least need it. Her failure to restore the £20 a week emergency uplift payment to those on Universal Credit will create another generation of millions in poverty struggling to survive in Food

Bank Britain. If the poor needed £20 a week during Covid 19, on what grounds can our government justify NOT restoring the £20 uplift during a cost-of-living crisis while the rich see tax cuts of thousands?

The elderly who worked all their lives are today overwhelmed by anxiety about how they will pay their bills or buy their food on their fixed-income pensions, as are disabled and housebound people, some of whom have disabling conditions such as fibromyalgia that require energy-consuming help and assistance to stop their condition rendering them bedridden with pain. This 'budget' offered just £150 for disabled people, together with an energy cap of £2,500, which, if you have a disability, will certainly not be high enough to cap their energy bills. Going without is not an option. This is not an eat or heat decision, it's life or death.

Government, both national and local, needs to find a vision and imagination adequate to this situation. Without support NOW many local charities at the heart of our communities will cease to exist after Christmas, to be replaced by organisations adept at filling in grant applications and who prey on local councils' legal obligation to care for and house the vulnerable.

Only last week in Deptford in South East London, a not-for-profit nursery, which had been set up by parents, had to close because, even with the government freeze, they could not pay an unaffordable increase in energy bills. The council has now let the vacated building to a profit-driven nursery operator that provides childcare at rates these parents simply cannot afford. So, most of them will now have to stop work and become dependent on welfare.

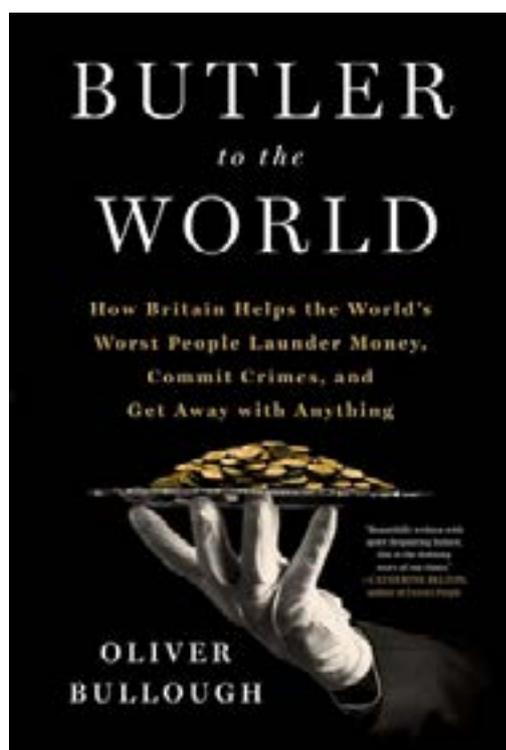
As you read this, the [We Care Foodbank](#) at Kath's Place Deptford has been saved from certain closure after former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown heard our plight on the BBC Radio 4 Today show on 22nd September. In response, his team made contact the same day and helped us launch this [appeal](#) to save closure, urging all those people who have been given huge tax breaks and state windfall payments to have a heart and encouraging 100 people to donate £150 each (matched by Aviva) to save We Care with the hashtag #HungerAlert.



To make a donation to support this work and save our community-driven life-saving project, please [donate](#) what you can or share across your social media networks



# REVIEW



## Butler to the World How Britain became the Servant of Tycoons, Tax Dodgers, Kleptocrats and Criminals Oliver Bullough (Profile Books, 2022)

*Reviewed by Jo Buchanan*

[Read online](#)

**I**n “Butler to the World” Oliver Bullough makes a direct comparison between the activities of the scheming and immoral, yet ever loyal, manservant Jeeves and some firmly rooted dubious and sordid practices in the UK which began as long ago as the 1950s. These practices assist unscrupulous characters, who clearly believe they are above the law, to dodge taxes, launder money and make huge profits from underhand schemes that are demonstrably unethical and often involve criminal behaviour.

Jeeves was a fictional character in a series of stories by P G Wodehouse (1881-1975). These stories were set in the late 1920s/early 1930s. Such was their impact that the name Jeeves became common parlance and is still used in a generic manner today. Indeed, so ubiquitous is the name that there is an internet search engine called ‘Ask Jeeves’. Jeeves has been referred to as both a valet and a butler to the idle Bertie Wooster, an extremely rich character of questionable morality. Wooster landed himself in all sorts of difficulties, and Jeeves proved himself indispensable, often managing to manipulate situations as he succeeded in extricating Wooster from no end of scrapes and threats and in smoothing things over, so Wooster could carry on just as before. Jeeves has useful connections, including rather suspect ones, and can engineer situations to his and therefore Wooster’s advantage. He can resort to blackmail and bribery and even acts of violence.

Bullough has investigated at some lengths how the UK is providing services, steeped in immorality, which benefit the rich and involve a good deal of dirty money. Throughout the book he makes comparisons between these goings on and the machinations of the, ever loyal, Jeeves. UK individuals and organisations can make money assisting rich clients such as oligarchs and global corporations to get away with things they could not get away with in other countries. Bullough reveals no end of tax-dodging and money laundering activities and the exploitation of loopholes, which often leave a trail of victims, who have suffered huge losses as a result. In the process, UK rules and taxes are undercut. Those involved can exploit variations in regulations in different parts

of the UK which “provide loopholes that the clever butler can use to hide his clients’ assets, behaviour and even existence”. These dubious and immoral activities can also thrive because, as we learn in the book, even where there are rules to deal with this behaviour, the law enforcement bodies and regulators have been both underfunded and undermined. Britain, in fact, has a major role in hindering worldwide attempts to deal with corruption.

Many of us have become aware of the tax havens in the Cayman Islands and British Virgin Islands, but Bullough also describes tax dodging and corrupt practices within such locations as the UK itself and the Isle of Man, Gibraltar and Anguilla. Do many of us know the amount of money made in Gibraltar by the skulduggery involved in establishing a hugely profitable gambling set up? And who knew how Boris Johnson set out to delay a report by the intelligence and security committee into seemingly dodgy Russian activity in the UK?

Bullough is a valuable source of information and reveals truths which most of us are scarcely aware of. He writes as a steely campaigner, a fact which became clear in his 2018 publication “Moneyland”. He writes directly and with a heartfelt determination to expose the truth in the hope that these immoral practices will one day come to an end. It is clearly an uphill task, as the roots go deep and involve bankers, politicians, the city, corporations, lawyers and lobbyists who find the butlering immensely lucrative. The conflict in Ukraine has complicated the situation, but this is not analysed, as the book was published before the war broke out. However, it is likely we will hear more from Bullough in his quest to bring this immoral and often criminal activity to light and be challenged.

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# CAMPAINS



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## Lies, Labour lies and who to vote for Dave Middleton

This week Labour's Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves told Sky News that the Tories had failed. What had they failed at? Failing to deport enough people. Yes, forget about the economy, the cost-of-living crisis, strikes breaking out everywhere, Tory corruption, massive inequality, the thing that matters to our would-be Chancellor is getting rid of foreigners.

When I see people on social media telling me how I must vote Labour to 'get the Tories out' and how failing to do so is to be a Tory enabler I can't help but wonder what this Labour government I'm supposed to support will be like. Momentum tell me that it is going to be a socialist government introducing a £15 minimum wage, nationalising railways and setting up a green energy company (on which see our front page).

But they say nothing about their anti-immigrant stance, or the fact that a sitting MP is being prevented from standing on a trumped up charge, or the delegate suspended for daring to mention peace. They conveniently forget that this Labour government I am supposed to support is made up of people who have lied about people I still consider comrades. Collateral damage, I guess.

And speaking of collateral damage this bunch of careerist crooks and charlatans are modelled on, and advised by, people who when in government took us into an illegal war in which over 1 million people were killed. Foreign Secretary Jack Straw in collusion with Director of Communications Alastair Campbell ensured that the 'dossier' presented to parliament made false claims about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. We now know the only weapons of mass destruction in Iraq were those dropped by America and Britain.

Meanwhile Attorney General Lord Goldsmith, there's a good working class name for you, was sent to America to be leaned on by a bunch of neo-cons to ensure that he would change his legal advice to give that war, clearly illegal as revealed by both the Hutton and Chilcot Inquiries, a veneer of legality it did not deserve. A change in advice that brought the resignation of Elizabeth Wilmshurst, his deputy chief legal adviser at the Foreign Office.

We forget, at our peril, just what Labour in office meant. Yes, there were some modest falls in child and pensioner poverty, but according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies these nowhere near matched the big rhetorical promises made by the government. Indeed, the IFS point out that the divide between rich and poor grew between the Blair years. Hardly surprising given Peter Mandelson's famous statement that he was "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich as long as they pay their taxes."

So, forgive me if I will not be running with a skip in my step to put my cross next to a Labour careerist come the next election. I don't like racists. I don't like liars. Or bullies. Moreover, I will not be voting for any party that not only tolerates them but reveres them.