The Plebs News

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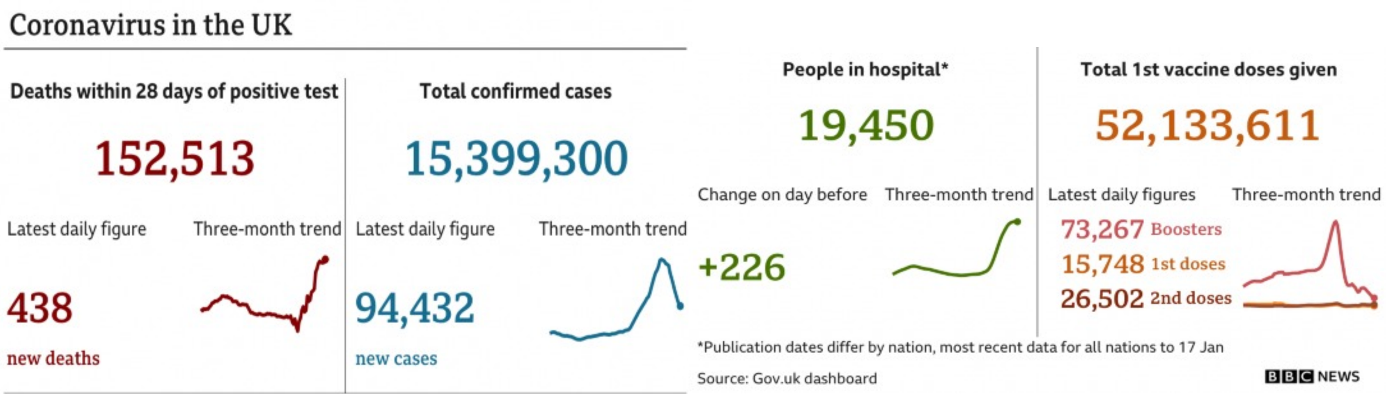
daveberrygmb@yahoo.co.uk January 2022

And the Covid Shambles Continues: Death toll hits 150,000 and new variant threatens NHS: Post Xmas rise in Omicron rates: Government threatened by “party” flouting of rules



Covid: Boris Johnson plans to 'ride out' Omicron wave with no more curbs :Jan 1

Boris Johnson says he hopes England can "ride out" the current wave of Covid-19 without further restrictions. But he acknowledged parts of the NHS would feel "temporarily overwhelmed" amid a surge of Omicron cases.

The prime minister said there was a "good chance" he would not impose fresh measures and would recommend continuing the government's "Plan B" strategy in England to ministers on Wednesday.

He also announced plans for 100,000 critical workers to take daily tests.

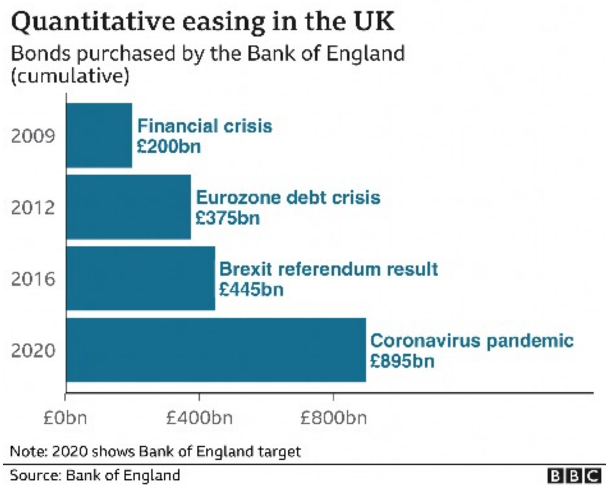
Chaotic Covax : Too many COVID-19 vaccine doses are being wasted : Since the Omicron variant of COVID-19 was detected, the stark global inequities that have characterised this pandemic have once again come to the forefront. From discriminatory travel bans to limited access to vaccines, African countries are bearing the burden of this inequity. The African Union, through its African Vaccine Acquisition Trust (AVAT), and the World Health Organization, through its COVAX scheme, have coordinated the procurement and delivery of the majority of vaccines in African countries. In late November, they published a joint statement highlighting that most of the donated vaccines are being provided with short shelf life and little notice.

People await the discharge of expired AstraZeneca vaccines at the Gosa dump site in Abuja, Nigeria on December 22,

Covid: Hospital trusts declare critical incidents over staff shortages

What does endemic really mean? It doesnt mean we do nothing.

The economics of the pandemic: When is a debt not a debt?



How is the Government funding the measures like furlough, grants to business and additional NHS spending? Almost all spending has been through a mechanism of Quantative |Easing. Some may think of this as "printing money" others as buying back Government debt from its owners. So far the Uk Government has used £400 billion of QE through the Bank of England. The big question is this debt and is it possible to owe money to yourself as the UK Government is the sole owner of the Bank of England. The article below argues that the debt will never need to be repaid and the National Debt is only half of the published figures. One thing for sure is that QE has finally put paid to the lie that a national economy is the same as a household budget. But will politicians be brave enough to tell us?

For me Quantative Easing is a useful tool but as Anne Pettifor points out it has been used to provide liquidity to an economic system already heavily favouring the rich whereas it could be used for more useful purposes, climate change springs to mind. In terms of economic history it provides the same function as government spending under the Keynesian influenced post war period before it was hijacked by the neoliberals. It also offers an alternative for a future Labour Government rather than plunging us back into austerity.

Tax Research UK

QE, or not QE?

Richard Murphy

I had a conversation yesterday in which the prospect of QE being unwound was discussed.

As regular readers of this blog know, I am firmly of the opinion that very little of the QE programme will ever be unwound, meaning that almost all the gilts that have been bought by the Bank of England on behalf of the Treasury (which did, of course, issue them in the first place) really are, in my opinion, effectively cancelled. The result is that the national debt is some £900 billion less than the government claims it to be.

The discussion very rapidly reached a number of conclusions. The first of these was that my suggestion was right. If there is ever any reversal of QE it will be in modest amount, at most.

Second, anything other than a reversal in very modest amount would run into massive financial market resistance. There is an appetite for UK government debt right now, and that is likely to continue, but there is no appetite in financial markets for £895 billion or so of debt to be returned to private ownership. The possibility of that happening, even over an extended period does not exist.

Third, a real attempt to achieve a reversal of the QE programme would have a massive economic consequence. That should not be hard to work out. Reversing even a small part of the QE programme will remove significant liquidity from the economy. The consequence will be fairly rapid reductions in cash available, most particularly to financial markets. They would need to sell other assets to buy bonds, and the only basis on which they might do that is if the bonds were sold at a significant discount to market price, meaning a loss might be suffered by the government on sale. This would also push up potential real interest rates considerably in the process. Consider all the knock on effects of that and asset prices would fall, rapidly. Even if we can all agree that asset prices are too high, rapid changes in their value will destabilise the finance system. Simultaneously falling share, bond, land and house prices because of an attempt by the government to sell significant numbers of old bonds in the market in an attempt to increase the real volume of public debt without there being government spending to match could trigger a financial collapse on a scale to make 2008 look like a picnic.

So, fourth, this is not going to happen.

In that case, fifth, the threat to unwind QE is in that case nothing more than a threat. Any reversal that does happen will in that case be mere token gestures.

In that case why is there a threat to reverse QE when it cannot happen, and why will token gestures take place when there is no real threat to follow through on the plan to reverse QE in any systematic way? The answer is that this is all politics. The objective is to say that QE could be reversed, and might have too be whilst debt is so high, but there is no real intention to do so because the real consequences are known. However, the messaging is sufficient to make people believe that austerity is essential, and that policy is what the proponents of this supposed plan really want.

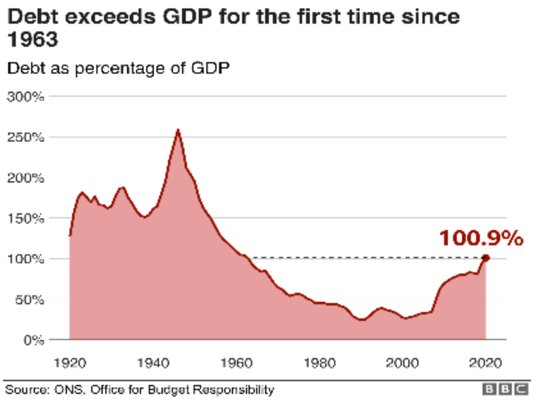
QE is being used as a political tool in that case, and not as an economic one. The reality is that the moment that there is any stress in the economy again we all know that QE will be used. Even omicron could trigger its use in 2022. But, the threat to reverse it will always be used as a mechanism to limit desirable government action by those who would rather we have government inaction and suffer for it than have government action and reap the rewards.

QE is now at the core of economic policy in that case. But more than that, it is at the core of political economy. And that is where the real action is. Explaining this is really important in that case.

More from Richard Murphy's blog on QE

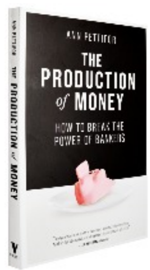
There's massive misunderstanding about what QE is and what it does. So please forgive a long thread on one of the most important tools used in modern economics, which if used properly might provide real hope for a better future.

Outside Japan QE was unknown until 2009. Since then the UK has done £845 billion of it. This is a big deal as a consequence. But as about half of that has happened this year it's appropriate to suggest that there have been two stage of QE, so far. And I suggest we need a third. Full article

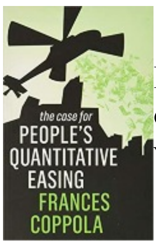


- UK general government gross debt was £2,224.5 billion at the end of financial year ending March 2021, equivalent to 106.0% of gross domestic product (GDP). This is smaller than Greece, Italy, France and Spain but larger than Germany, Austria, Ireland, Denmark and Sweden. \Full Chart

And from another economist Anne Pettifor



Quantitative easing (QE) made easy



In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, central banks created trillions of dollars of new money, and poured it into financial markets. 'Quantitative Easing' (QE) was supposed to prevent deflation and restore economic growth.

Making Economics Simple

Letting the Cat out of the Bag
Anonymous

"What did you tell that man just now?"
"I told him to hurry."
"What right do you have to tell him to hurry?"
"I pay him to hurry."
"How much do you pay him?"
"Four dollars a day."
"Where do you get the money?"
"I sell products."
"Who makes the products?"
"He does."
"How many products does he make in a day?"
"Ten dollars' worth."
"Then, instead of you paying him, he pays you $6 a day to stand aroun
and tell him to hurry."
"Well, but I own the machines."
"How did you get the machines?"
"Sold products and bought them."
"Who made the products?"
"Shut up. He might hear you."

From United Automobile Wor r, *October 1937.*

Authors unknown - a number of versions©1700s

The law locks up the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the common
But leaves the greater villain loose
Who steals the common from off the goose

The law demands that we atone
When we take things we do not own
But leaves the lords and ladies fine
Who take things that are yours and mine

The poor and wretched don't escape
If they conspire the law to break
This must be so but they endure
Those who conspire to make the law

The law locks up the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the common
And geese will still a common lack
Till they go and steal it back
[17C protest against English enclosures]

tribunemag.co.uk

Ten Times Workers Beat the Bosses in 2021

At first glance, 2021 might not seem like a year with much to celebrate for workers.

It began with a renewed global pandemic threatening jobs and pay in just about every sector of the British economy. And not only that, but with the government refusing to implement policies like liveable sick pay, workers ended up bearing a huge cost for public health measures.

As the year progressed, a cost of living crisis began to squeeze wages further. There were pay rises in some areas, but even these were often swallowed by sizeable increases in basic costs such as energy, food and rent. It could have been the case that 2o21 went down as a bad year for workers.

But amidst the challenging context, the year has seen many stories of growing industrial militancy—and a string of victories that have pushed back against the bosses' offensive across the country. Here, we remember ten of the most prominent.

Brighton's Bin Strike Wins a Raise for Low-Paid Council Workers Across the City

In the autumn, HGV drivers working at 'Cityclean', the refuse and recycling department of Brighton and Hove City Council, voted to strike in relation to an unresolved dispute over management changes to routes. The resulting 14-day strike led to pileups of uncollected rubbish across the city, with residents posting images on social media of overflowing bins and blocked pavements. The dispute was finally resolved on 20 October when the GMB approved a new agreement with the Green-led council that addressed the concerns over management of routes, as well as related pay issues.

The importance of this particular service, and the visible impact of it not being performed for 14 days, gave the GMB maximum leverage in the dispute. The Green council knew they couldn't continue to have communal bins overflowing, and streets covered in rubbish. The resulting deal addressed historic issues of low pay, not just for the HGV drivers, but for all workers on the lowest pay grades—those not even subject to the dispute or members of the GMB.

This episode shows the collective power of workers who join trade unions, and that their power can be used to force pay rises for workers across other sectors. For those looking at the success of the 54 HGV drivers that went on strike, the lesson is simple—join a trade union!

– Jacob Taylor, a member of Brighton Pavilion CLP, writing for Tribune in October

Rolls Royce Workers Save the Future of Barnoldswick

As 2021 draws to a close, the long-running dispute at the birthplace of the jet engine appears to be finally over after workers secured a new deal resulting in a five-year no compulsory redundancy agreement being reached.

Back in November 2020, workers at Rolls Royce up in Barnoldswick, Lancashire were left with no choice other than that of industrial action after the company reneged on previous promises and announced it was shipping the majority of the work to Singapore and Spain.

After nine weeks of action, an agreement was reached with Unite, which was supposed to bring in new green technology and see a new training school built, with new work coming to site—but back in April it became clear to workers that Rolls Royce were failing to keep their promises again.

After failing to secure assurances from the company, further ballots were held, and with just seventeen people taking more action the plant was brought to its knees after just three weeks, forcing Rolls Royce back to the negotiating table.

A Unite source said: ‘This worker-led victory is a clear message to employers across the country: Unite will not sit back and let you take our jobs. The dispute at Barnoldswick is a demonstration of the effectiveness of targeted industrial action. The revised agreement brings to an end the dispute, secures the future for the site and will see new work now come to the site. We are proud that our members had the courage to make a stance and their bravery has given them, their families and their communities the result they deserve.’

Salford’s Care Workers Win a Historic Pay Rise

Earlier in December, Anchor Hanover—England’s largest provider of specialist residential and elderly care—announced a £19 million package to uplift its lowest paid care workers to the Real Living Wage of £9.90 an hour. This will mean a pay increase for 70 carers in Salford, and 4,888 carers nationally—around 50 percent of Anchor’s workforce—in a sector where industrial organising has traditionally faced huge challenges. This was following a campaign from Salford Unison and Salford City Council, who are pioneering a strategy of joint campaigning to increase workers’ rights, bargaining power, and union recognition across the city.

Deep organising within social care is notoriously difficult. Over a third of this largely female, disproportionately BAME workforce are on zero-hours contracts. In the case of homecare workers, this rises to one in two. Precarity of employment is used ruthlessly by private sector care providers to suppress collective organisation among workers, and continually drive down pay and standards. The victory means a pay rise for 70 carers in Salford, and 4,888 carers nationally. (Unison)

Much of the casualisation and precarity in the sector has been caused by privatisation, breeding an environment of fear among workers facing hostile employment practices and expectations to work well beyond paid hours—often in physically unsafe conditions. The context of privatisation has been real-terms budgetary pressures year on year, particularly since the link between funding and need in social care was scuppered by the Tory torpedoing of Gordon Brown’s proposed Inheritance Tax in the 2010 General Election. Ever since, the Conservatives have promised regularly to provide a solution to the funding crisis in social care—but have still provided no clarity on what the offer is to be.

Achieving a victory of this scale in the private care sector is a huge victory for workers—and we believe provides a template for a new wave of industrial organising fit for the twenty-first century.

– Steven North, Branch Secretary of Salford City Unison and a member of Unison’s National Executive Committee, and Paul Dennett, Elected Salford City Mayor, the Greater Manchester portfolio lead on Planning and Infrastructure, Housing and Homelessness, and the Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester, writing for Tribune in December

ScotRail Staff Win for Key Workers

Throughout 2021, RMT union in Scotland battled with employer Abellio ScotRail and won. Rail workers were referenced throughout the pandemic as key and essential, but when it came to recognition, the employer refused to recognise the loyalty shown by workers turning up for work every day during the pandemic, and taking the risk both to themselves and their families.To compound this further, ScotRail decided to terminate a rest day working agreement. This was not only unfair—it meant key workers were being treated differently within the same workplace. This followed nine months of no trains running on a Sunday. The contempt ScotRail and Transport Scotland (TS) showed was staggering.

But after almost eighteen months of stonewalling by ScotRail and TS, we targeted COP26. 30,000 delegates having to get taxis and buses during COP would have been met with worldwide embarrassment.

We therefore won a deal for the majority of ScotRail. We will be back round the table in four months' time for 2022, and we will be demanding RPI for our members. Our dispute proves what can be achieved if you are prepared to fight and win—but you need to be organised and prepared. This was what RMT embarked upon, and we successfully delivered for 3000 members in Scotland.

– Michael Hogg, RMT Regional Organiser for Scotland

Sage Care Home Strikers Beat Poverty Pay

I've been working at Sage, a Jewish elder care home in North London, for three years. During Covid, there weren't enough staff for us to feel safe. We started to talk about our conditions—the conditions of how we were working, and how we were treated. With Covid, we felt like we were putting our lives at risk, and our wages were very low. We also didn't have anything other than statutory sick pay—£96 a week, which you can't live on. So in the first summer following Covid, we joined our union, United Voices of the World, and we started organising. One year ago, in the winter of 2020, we had the first strike. Management didn't listen to us at all. Then we had another strike in early 2021, and again, they didn't listen to us. Management approached it by saying, 'We're family. We're doing the best we can.'

But by then the pressure was growing, and after we struck, we won the London living wage of £10.85 [the London living wage has since risen to £11.05], and an improvement in our sick pay. It was a win, and people were happy, but the London living wage is what we should have had all this time. There's still more to change—and now we have to continue fighting.

– Julia Gonzalez, a carer at Sage care home

Go North West Drivers Beat Fire and Rehire

Last year, Go North West announced Reset 2020, a plan to stem its alleged annual losses of £1.8 million at Queens Road Depot in north Manchester. As part of the plan, Go North West intended to tear up the existing work contracts of the company's 485 drivers and re-employ them on worse terms. The proposed changes included rolling out 'flexible working', with a whole host of new rostering and holiday agreements introduced, and extending drivers' working hours for no additional pay—terms which bus drivers simply could not accept. Go North West attempted to sugarcoat the proposed terms by offering drivers a one-off payment of £5,000 in return for accepting terms. Unite exposed this odious sleight of hand by pointing out the changes would have resulted in a reduction to the overall wages of their members by an estimated £2,000 a year, meaning that within three years its members would have been worse off.

The drivers were set deadlines, sometimes of just a few days, to accept their new contracts or find a new job. In response to this act of industrial blackmail, 82% of the 485 drivers voted to go on strike in February. Lasting 85 days, the strike was one of the longest in the history of Unite and the longest in recent history for the entire passenger transport sector.

After considerable pressure, negotiations began again in April and last weekend Unite and Go North West reached a deal. The deal is a win for the drivers, not least because it contains a promise from both Go North West and Go Ahead Group (Go North West's parent company) that they will not use fire and rehire in future—a historic victory in the context of its widespread imposition elsewhere. Drivers will also maintain control of rosters, and, crucially, they have secured pay rises, underlining the point that collective bargaining power is the most important determinant of pay.

– Alex King, a Manchester-based freelance journalist, writing in Tribune in May

Bexley Bin Workers Win Pay Parity

In Bexley, we worked for a company called Serco, and there were about eight or nine different pay structures there, so a lot of the strike was about pay parity. If you're working with someone you know is on £8 an hour and you're on £10 an hour, it's not a good feeling.

When we went out to strike, there were about 70 of us. There were a lot of people who were scared to come out—scared for their jobs. The agency workers felt worried that if they went on strike with us they wouldn't have any more work. The strike got into its second week, and Serco still weren't really talking. We finally got some meetings together, and put our argument across, but we just kept getting shut down. The meetings were anything from five to eight hours some days. And we had a protest outside the civic offices in Bexleyheath. We went leafleting round the neighbourhood and the town centre, too, to get the residents involved, and explain to them why we had to be on strike—which obviously we never wanted to be. Most of them were pretty understanding.

In the fourth week, Serco lost the contract, and we started to have meetings with the new contractors CountryStyle. After a few we managed to draft up a good agreement before they came in and took over. So everyone's now on the same rate of pay, with the same terms and conditions. That was our biggest victory. In total, it was seven weeks of strike action. It was a long time, but a lot of the guys were in very high spirits. And it was successful.

–Royal Mail Workers Stand Strong for a Colleague

In October, workers at the Royal Mail office in Llanelli went on strike in solidarity with a colleague who was sacked. After CWU member Gary Evans was suspended from work, outrage emanated across the shop floor: his sacking was on grounds that, although they can't be revealed due to ongoing proceedings at the time, were found to be disgraceful by practically the whole workforce. Outrage from across the shop floor turned into action, and the local CWU branch—which Evans was a member of, and is a particularly good example of a tight, organised union branch—voted 98.6 percent for strike action. The workers held a one-day strike in Evan's defence.

The picket, which was strongly attended, also received a video call from the union's General Secretary, Dave Ward, who let Evans and the strikers know that the full weight of the national union was behind them. In the end, only the managers crossed the picket line, and resolve remained strong; after a second strike was set to take place in the following week, Evans was reinstated to work.

HGV Drivers Win Historic Pay Rises

I'm the lead Unite rep on the Wincanton contract for Morrisons, representing around 200 drivers at Northwich and around 600 around Northwich, Wakefield and Stockton. We had a record pay award for three sites, including twenty-four percent for the Stockton drivers, who have traditionally been treated like second-class citizens by Morrisons and Wincanton. Through the strength of unity across the three sites, we achieved parity pay for them.

There is no doubt that our drivers are very pleased that this is recognition for the hard work they do. Without all these drivers delivering into the supermarkets, nobody's food would get there, and they certainly did feel completely undervalued by the employer. The fact that they are key workers and have been relied upon throughout the pandemic was never recognised by the employer in that sense, and this pay award goes some way to make them feel a whole lot better about the contribution they make.

The fact that we had to take a strike ballot with a 98% return demonstrated to the employer that we meant business, and that as a tri-site agreement, we were going to make sure that our drivers were recognised in the proper way. This goes some way toward doing that. It really means a lot for the drivers I represent, and I think that it is the right thing at the right time where we have a shortage of drivers and an employer trying to keep the wage rates down as far as they can, in a race to the bottom. It was clear that the supermarket chains across the whole sector were trying to keep wages low, and hopefully this will in some way affect any other wage settlement claims within our sector. We're all very pleased with what's happened, and we couldn't have done it without the strength of Unite the union behind us.

– Trevor Roland, Unite lead rep

The Shrewsbury 24 Overcome Five Decades of Injustice

48 years ago, on 19 December 1973, three convicted pickets were ferried by prison van from Shrewsbury Crown Court to the nearby prison to begin their jail sentences. This year, on the anniversary of that awful day, I accompanied John McKinsie Jones back to the prison (now a visitor attraction), to reflect on the miscarriage of justice that led him to be given a nine-month sentence for alleged picketing offences. John said that it was the worst day of his life, just six days before Christmas. His wife Rita was eight months pregnant at the time with their second child. The anguish of leaving her and their one-year-old daughter devastated him. He has never got over it. John and other pickets worked with the Shrewsbury 24 Campaign over the past fifteen years to overturn their convictions. Although the Criminal Cases Review Commission rejected the pickets' applications in 2017, John never gave up. He and seven of his fellow pickets were determined to obtain justice and, together with the Campaign, fought on. He and Rita came with me and other members of the Campaign to a deserted London on 3 February 2021 to sit in Court 4 of the Royal Courts of Justice for the appeal hearing.

At 10:30 AM on 23 March I was delighted to ring John to break the news that the Court of Appeal had quashed all the pickets' convictions. John was overjoyed and said, 'The living hell that the Shrewsbury pickets have been through for nearly fifty years should never have happened. It should not happen to anyone else who takes part in a strike.'

We have achieved justice because we never gave up. It has been a memorable victory for the whole labour and trade union movement.

– Eileen Turnbull, Researcher and Secretary of the Shrewsbury 24 Campaign

Meanwhile the fightback in Sheffield is on

- Resuming the UK's longest ever gig-economy pay strike, industrial action continues from today in Sheffield with pickets outside local McDonalds.
- Couriers launched the strike in December after Stuart, which delivers for JustEat, slashed its base pay per delivery by 24% to just £3.40.
- After working throughout the pandemic, these key workers are demanding a pay rise instead of a pay cut and an end to unlimited unpaid waiting times.

10 January: the UK's longest ever gig-economy pay strike resumes today as Sheffield couriers from the the Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB) relaunch industrial action and will picket McDonalds branches every day this week.

Last week Stuart invited selected riders to closed-door meetings on pay which excluded all unionised workers. When IWGB members staged a peaceful demonstration outside the Sheffield location, they were informed by venue security that the meeting had been cancelled and Stuart staff had left the building via a ground floor fire escape.

Please donate to IWGB Solidarity Fund https://iwgb.org.uk/en/page/donate

South Yorkshire bus strikes off as Stagecoach drivers secure 'huge' pay win

Bus strikes across South Yorkshire have been called off after more than 560 Stagecoach drivers voted to accept a 'huge' 10.7 per cent pay increase.

The pay deal, negotiated by Unite, the UK's leading union, will see drivers pay increase by more than £1 an hour. From May, drivers in Sheffield will see their hourly rate rise from £10.50 to £11.60, while drivers' pay in Barnsley and Rotherham will go from £10.80 to £11.91.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: "This is a huge win for our members at Stagecoach in South Yorkshire and shows what can be achieved when workers stand together in a union.

Following acceptance of the deal, all strike action has been cancelled and bus services will continue to run as normal.

Unite regional officer Phil Bown said: "This result shows what can be achieved through strong union organisation, which is why we urge workers looking to improve their pay and conditions to join Unite and to get their colleagues to do the same."

Still on the buses: the campaign for public buses

Better Buses for South YorkshireGreen New Deal UK - South Yorkshire Hub

Today, Rotherham Council will debate a "better buses" motion demanding faster action to bring your buses into public control. If you're free at 1.30, join us outside the council meeting near Magna Science! DM for more details.

Together we can win better buses!

Walkley Branch have collected monthly for S6 Foodbank and residents of Boyce St raised thousands through Quality Street displays and cake baking stalls during 2021. For some this is charity but for others it is deeply political.

Thoughts for the New Year, from S6 Foodbank manager, Chris Hardy.

It was the 18th December at 7 in the morning, I had just made my morning coffee when I started crying. It was through despair and relief. The day before we had given out 10 tonnes of food from 3 of our sites and over 20 tonnes in total during the week from our other 7 sites,. I always think about how we're in this position, where we're heading and what does an increase of 20% look like next year (which unfortunately is our natural growth).

Move to Christmas Eve at 10 in the morning and we're running a mopping up service to make sure everyone has food for Christmas and New Year. A lady turns up and I recognise the look I've seen a thousand times this year a look of shame and despair of what's going to happen next, not only today but in the months ahead. She explains that her husband has just been made redundant and Universal Credit has told her it will be 6 weeks (end of January) before the benefits will be in place. The reality, which I didn't say, was it was more likely to be the end of February at best.

They only have £300 for rent and all their bills so Christmas is out which is hard when they've got 3 children. She says this is the first time they've used foodbank and she feels a real shame at being at our door especially on Christmas Eve when she should be with family. I see it in her eyes. I tell her we're here to support her through their circumstances until they're on their feet, we're also able to give her a gift card for Tesco as well as two weeks worth of food and presents for the family to give her the dignity of having at least one day of not having to face into their next eight weeks reality.

I see her relief even if it's going to be short lived, I think about my own relief the week before at having enough food to support hundreds of families week in week out and the relentlessness of it throughout the year we've just been through and the year ahead.

My relief and hope comes from knowing the community is with us and my deep seated belief that foodbanks only work when it's community helping community.

My hope at foodbank always comes from the community. At this time of goodwill I'm fortunate enough to see this goodwill all year around and the tireless work our communities go to to make sure we have enough food/ money to be able to support all the people we see in their hour of need.

We rely on our communities to do our local Saturday collections on the street in all weather, our students, guides and scout groups, the rotary clubs and other organisations, and business who provide both money and volunteers, our churches and people of other faiths. I also love the individual ideas people have to raise both money and awareness whether this is running marathons, being quiet for a few hours or the Quality Street houses - all the ideas bring community together

As I look forward to the year ahead I feel more hope than despair. Our eleven sites across lots of different communities (soon to be twelve) and all the volunteers who it takes to run these sites week in week out and the amount of love they give to each person who walks through their doors. The thought of having services in each of our sites to help people at the point of need; that each one of our sites can be a focal point and beacon for anyone in need (not only for food) in the community. Also sharing our data with Trussell Trust so we can change policy nationally and give a voice to the people who walk through our doors, and through both of these actions not see a rise in numbers but see them go down.

I would have loved both politicians and everyone who has donated to the foodbank to have seen my experience on Christmas Eve.

Politicians to see the unjustness of over 8 weeks without any money and the look on the lady's face.

Donors to foodbank, to see the relief on her face as she left with not only food and gifts but hope of a brighter future.

Thank you to everyone!

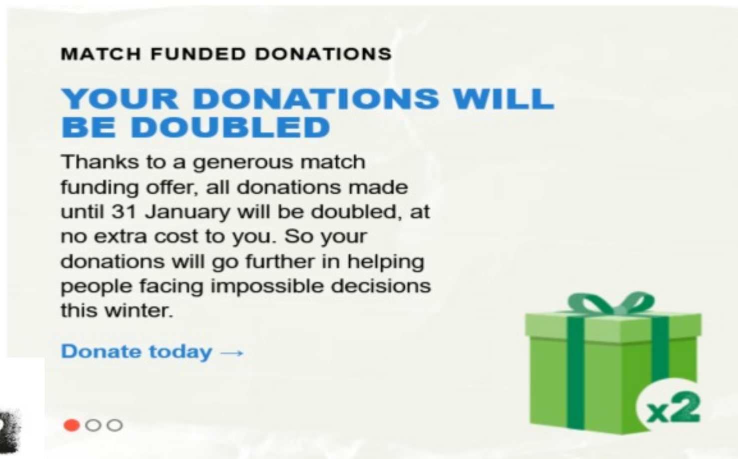
Chris Hardy

S6 Foodbank Manager

The S6 Foodbank started as a small operation with a small room at the St Thomas Church, Philadelphia but is now an amalgamation of foodbanks across Sheffield and part of the Trussell Trust Network, a national charity. Not only does the charity provide food but also campaigns for political change to end the need for foodbanks.

WE WILL CREATE A UK WITHOUT THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

We support a nationwide network of food banks an
together we provide emergency food and support t
people locked in poverty, and campaign for change
to end the need for food banks in the UK.



What will Labour’s response be to the energy crisis and the failure of regulation?

we own it

Public services for people not profit

An open letter to Sir Keir Starmer on public ownership

23 September 2021

Dear Sir Keir Starmer,

In 2020 we asked all of the Labour leadership and deputy leadership candidates to sign the 10 We Own It pledges on public ownership. We were very happy that you signed up to those pledges.

In 2020 you also made your own pledge for ‘common ownership’ in which you said ‘Public services should be in public hands, not making profits for shareholders. Support common ownership of rail, mail, energy and water; end outsourcing in our NHS, local government and justice system.’ We were very happy to see that too.

In your recent pamphlet for the Fabians, ‘The Road Ahead’, public or common ownership is not mentioned. We’re writing to ask for clarification on why this is the case, and to offer five reasons why public ownership of public services must continue to be a core policy for the Labour Party.

1. Public ownership is popular

2. Public ownership can help Labour tackle key challenges

3. Public ownership saves money

4. Public ownership can give people more control

5. Public ownership is a common sense policy

64% of us want the railways to be in public ownership

69% want the Royal Mail in public ownership

52% want energy in public ownership

63% want water in public ownership

84% want our NHS fully in public ownership

55% want to see services run in-house by councils

55% want buses in public ownership

62% want prisons in public ownership

We're wasting £13 billion on privatisation every year. That's £250 million every single week. These are statistics that Labour should be talking about.

Public ownership of water would save £2.5 billion a year - investing this could reduce leakage levels by a third.

Public ownership of energy networks would save £3.7 billion a year - enough to buy 222 new offshore wind turbines.

Public ownership of rail would save £1 billion a year - enough to buy 100 miles of new railway track.

Public ownership of buses would save £506 million a year - enough to buy 1,356 new electric buses.

Public ownership of Royal Mail would save £171 million a year - enough to open 342 new Crown Post Offices with postbanks.

Public ownership of broadband would save £500 million a year - enough to pay for full fibre broadband for 6 million households.

Ending the internal market in the NHS would save at least £4.5 billion a year - enough to pay for extra staff - 72,000 nurses and 20,000 doctors.

Energy: public ownership would be drastically cheaper

As the bills mount up for working-class people, it is madness that nationalising energy suppliers is not a central part of the conversation despite all the evidence that shows it makes sense, writes REBECCA LONG BAILEY MP

TESTED ALTERNATIVE: Romney Marsh Solar Farm in Kent which covers an area of approximately 114 acres and provides the national grid with 19MWp of power, enough to account for over 6,000 households

The private industry refused to invest in green energy until promised public subsidy. Shareholdres have always been prioritised over the consumer.

HOUSEHOLDS are in the midst of a cost of living catastrophe which is only set to get worse. Many will face higher taxes when National Insurance goes up, food bills are rising, council tax is expected to increase, lifelines such as the £20 increase in universal credit have been cut and real wages are set to fall as inflation, taxes and interest rates rise. On top of all of this, annual fuel bills are expected to rise by a whopping 50 per cent to £2,000 when the current energy price cap is raised in April.

So it is right to call for emergency temporary relief. For example, the government must cut the rate of VAT for household energy bills as soon as possible. They must expand and increase the Warm Homes Discount, the costs of supplier failure must be prevented from going onto bills, there must be an increase in universal credit to offset soaring inflation — as well an increase in public-sector pay and the living wage. But as we all know, there are much longer-term problems that must be addressed urgently.

Sadly, many warned of this outcome some time ago. Closing Britain's largest gas storage plant in 2017 without a plan to replace it was illogical. The government was repeatedly warned at the time that the country faced more volatile winter gas prices and was becoming too dependent on energy imports — and they simply didn't listen.

The power of a true Green New Deal was also ignored, with paltry levels of investment in renewable, low-carbon energy and storage and no urgent national plan to insulate and retrofit homes to bring energy use down. But perhaps one of the most acute issues is the business model of the energy sector as a whole.

For years since privatisation the monopoly grid companies prioritised dividend extraction over upgrading the system for renewable energy. For example, National Grid paid shareholders £1.4 billion in both 2020 and 2021 and a record £3.2 billion in 2017. The generators didn't really start investing in renewables until public subsidies were put on the table and the supply market is in complete disarray. I say "market" but that's a real stretch of the term, because with so few energy switchers, the supply companies didn't really compete for customers, with many stuck on exorbitant tariffs for years. Even the government eventually admitted there was a problem after huge public pressure and eventually agreed to a form of price cap in the end — although as today's crisis shows, it is a very flexible price cap. And now smaller suppliers are folding, creating even less competition, leaving huge market shares for the bigger players who remain.

In response to this collapse, we see the government setting aside billions in public funds to prop up firms too big to fail — but with that public money comes no public stake in return, no change in the broken market, no reduction in household bills and none of the benefits of public ownership.

If our energy system was brought into public ownership however, public companies would not be duty bound to prioritise huge returns for shareholders. They could invest in the energy system, invest in renewables and use the financially buoyant times to build up reserves to protect against the types of price fluctuations we are seeing. These companies would be transparent and democratically accountable to the needs of consumers, not driven by a director duty to prioritise shareholder return above all else.

They understand this in Germany, where two-thirds of all electricity is bought from municipally owned energy companies. They understand this is France too, two-thirds buy their electricity from EDF, majority-owned by the French state, which also runs the grids and generates most of the electricity.

Indeed EDF actually supplies and generates energy for homes here in Britain, thus generating profit for the French state, but we do not have our own public energy companies generating a return for people here in Britain. I think most people would find this absurd.

And public ownership does point towards cheaper bills. A 2013 study by the department of economics, management and quantitative method at the University of Milan found when comparing electricity costs across the whole of Europe that public system ownership is associated with prices 20 per cent to 30 per cent lower than private ownership. In Britain, recent research by David Hall and Vera Weghmann at the University of Greenwich showed that eliminating private energy ownership would be equivalent to a staggering 25 per cent reduction in energy prices.

So it is clear that public ownership must be central to addressing the crisis we face in our energy system and it is time that our communities are delivered an energy system that is not driven by profit, but structured around necessity, fairness and environmental sustainability.

Rebecca Long Bailey is MP for Salford and Eccles.

Benefits and costs of bringing water, energy grid and Royal Mail into public ownership

UNIVERSITY of GREENWICH

Electricity prices and public ownership: Evidence from the EU15 over thirty years

• Results suggest that public ownership is associated with lower residential electricity prices in Western Europe.

Don't trust the market: lessons from spiraling gas and electricity prices in Europe

Addressing climate change needs an energy transition that cannot be achieved through markets that privilege immediate profits over long-term societal gains, writes PRABIR PURKAYASTHA

THE current crisis in Europe of spiraling gas prices, coupled with a cold snap, highlights the fact that the transition of any part of the world to green energy is not going to be easy. It also brings out the complexity of such a transition, that energy policy is not simply choosing the right technology, but has economic and geopolitical dimensions as well.

The European Union has made the problem of a green transition worse by choosing a completely market-based approach for gas pricing. As we saw in Texas last year, such policies fail during vagaries of weather, pushing gas prices to levels where the poor may have to simply turn off their heating. In winter, gas prices skyrocket in Europe, as they did last year and again this year.

One lesson for other countries is clear. Markets do not solve the problem of energy pricing, as they require planning, long-term investments and stability in pricing. India's electricity sector will face a disaster if it is handed over to electricity traders as is being proposed. This is what the so-called "separation of wires from the electricity they carry" means in the Modi government's proposed amendment to the existing Electricity Act.

Let us look at the current problem of gas in Europe, particularly of the European Union (EU).

The EU has chosen gas as its choice of fuel for electricity production, as it goes off coal and nuclear while also investing heavily in wind and solar. The argument advanced is that gas would provide the EU with a transitional fuel for its low-carbon emission path as it produces less emissions than coal. The problem with green energy is that it requires a much larger capacity addition which planners are not taking into account.

In higher latitudes, during winter, days are shorter, and we, therefore, get fewer hours of sunlight. This seasonal problem with solar has been compounded in Europe with low winds this year, reducing the electricity output of windmills. The European Union has banked heavily on gas to meet its short- and medium-term goals of cutting down greenhouse emissions. It is another matter that gas is at best a short-term solution as it still emits half as much greenhouse gas as coal. Gas can be stored to meet short-term and seasonal needs, and even production increased easily from gas fields with requisite pumping capacity.

All this requires advanced planning and investment in surplus capacity to meet the requirements of daily or seasonal fluctuations. Unfortunately, the EU is a strong believer that markets magically solve all problems. It has moved away from long-term price contracts for gas and into spot and short-term prices; unlike China, India and Japan which all have long-term contracts indexed to the oil price. Why does the gas price affect the price of electricity in the EU? After all, natural gas accounts only for about 25 per cent of the EU's electricity generation. Unfortunately for the people, not only gas but also the electricity markets have been "liberalised" under the market reforms in the EU. The energy mix in the grid is determined by energy market auctions, in which electricity producers bid their prices and the quantity they will supply to the electricity grid. These bids are accepted, in order from lowest to highest, until the next day's predicted demand is fully met. The last bidder's price then becomes the price for all producers.

In economists' language, this is its "marginal price" discovered through the market auction and, therefore, the "natural" price of electricity. At present, the marginal producer is natural gas, and that is why the price of gas also determines the price of electricity in Europe.

This explains the almost 200 per cent rise in electricity price in Europe last year. This year, according to the EU, "Gas prices are increasing globally, but more significantly in net importer regional markets like Asia and the EU. So far in 2021, prices tripled in the EU and more than doubled in Asia while only doubling in the US." The coupling of the gas and the electricity markets by using the marginal price as the price of all producers means that if gas spot prices triple as they have currently, so will electricity prices. No prizes for guessing who gets hit the hardest with such increases!

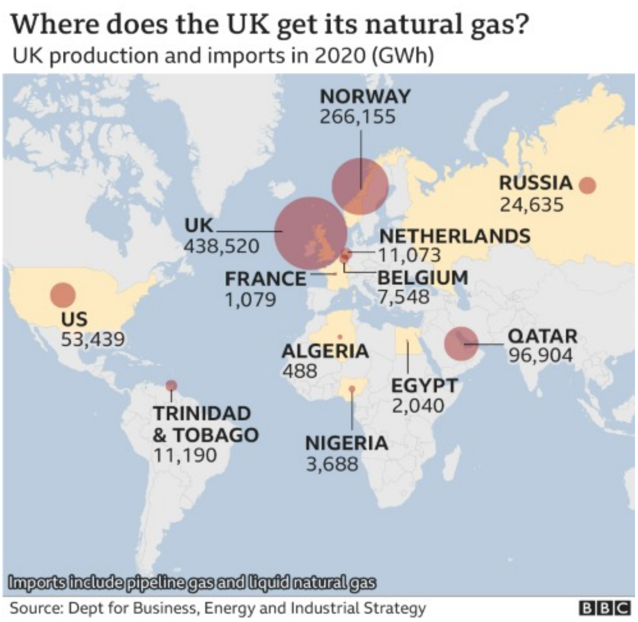
Though there has been criticism of using marginal price as the price of electricity for all suppliers irrespective of their respective costs, the neoliberal beliefs in the god of the market have ruled supreme in Europe. Russia has long-term contracts as well as short-term contracts with EU countries. President Vladimir Putin has mocked the EU's fascination with spot prices and gas prices and said that Russia is willing to supply more gas via long-term contracts. Though the European Commission authorities agree that Russia has honoured its long-term commitments, it claims that Russia could do more to meet the EU's short-term needs, which are causing their huge spike in gas prices. The question here is that you either believe in the efficiency of the markets or you don't. You cannot argue that markets are best when spot prices are low, as in summer, and lose that belief in winter asking Russia to supply more in order to "control" the market price. And if markets indeed are best, why not help the market by expediting the regulatory clearances of Nord Stream 2? This brings us to the knotty question of the EU and Russia. The Ukraine crisis that is roiling the relationship between the EU and Russia is closely linked to gas as well.

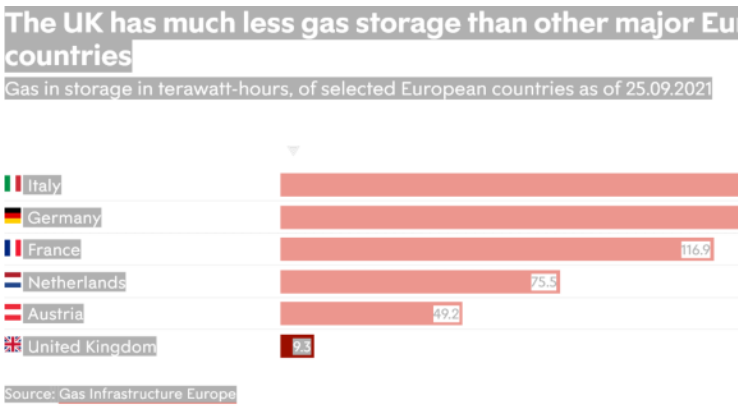
Pipelines from Russia through Ukraine and Poland, along with the undersea Nord Stream 1, currently supply the bulk of Russian gas to the EU. Russia also has additional capacity via the newly commissioned Nord Stream 2 to supply more gas to Europe. There is little doubt that Nord Stream 2 is caught not simply in regulatory issues but the geopolitics of gas in Europe. The US pressured Germany not to allow Nord Stream 2 to be commissioned, including the threat of sanctions. It was virtually the last major decision by Angela Merkel that she resisted this pressure and forced the US to back off. The Ukraine crisis has created further pressure on Germany to postpone Nord Stream 2, even if it means worsening its twin crisis of gas and electricity prices. The net beneficiary in all of this is the US, which gets a buyer for its more expensive fracking gas. Russia currently supplies about 40 per cent of the EU's gas.If this drops, the US, which supplies less than 5 per cent of EU's gas, could be a big gainer. The US interest in sanctioning Russian gas and not commissioning Nord Stream 2, has as much to do with seeing that Russia does not become too important to the EU as with support to Ukraine. This could lead to a common pan-European market and a larger Eurasian consolidation. Just as in east and south-east Asia, the US has a vested interest in stopping trade following geography instead of politics.

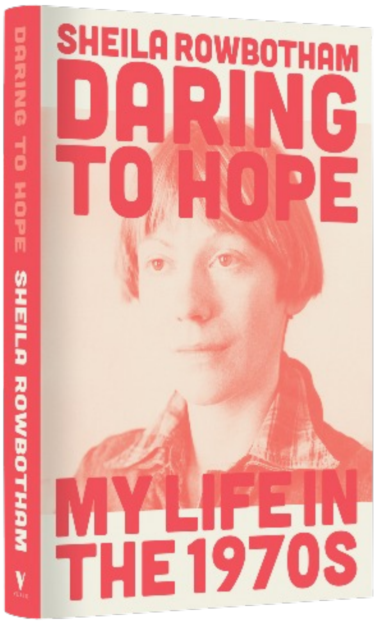
Interestingly, gas pipelines from the Soviet Union to western Europe were built during the cold war as geography and trade got primacy over cold war politics. The US wants to focus on Nato and the Indo-Pacific, as its focus is on the oceans. Nato is, after all, the “North Atlantic Treaty Organisation,” and of course, the Indo-Pacific means the Indian and Pacific oceans. In geographical terms, the oceans are not separate but a continuous body covering more than 70 per cent of the world’s surface with three major islands: Eurasia, Africa and the Americas. In this, Eurasia is by far the bigger island, with more than 70 per cent of the world’s population. That is why the US does not want such a consolidation. We are passing through perhaps the greatest transition that our civilisation has known in meeting the challenge of climate change. It needs an energy transition that cannot be achieved through markets that privilege immediate profits over long-term societal gains.

If gas is indeed the transitional fuel, at least for Europe, it needs long-term policies of integrating its gas grid with gas fields with adequate storage. And it needs to stop playing games with its energy and our climate future for the benefit of the US. Markets do not work for infrastructure. Long-term planning with state leadership is what we need for our supplying everyone with electricity and our green transition; instead of mystical belief in electricity markets created artificially by a few regulators framing rules to favour the private producers of electricity: in India from where I’m writing, Ambani, Adani, Tata and Birla.

This article is adapted from the original at peoplesdemocracy.in.







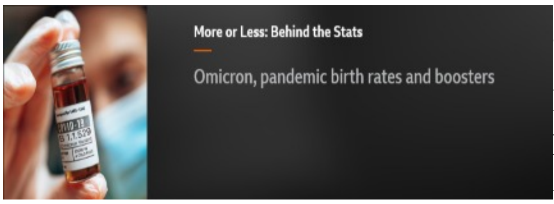
Sheila Rowbotham- Daring to Hope

A personal history of life, love and women's liberation

In this powerful memoir Sheila Rowbotham looks back at her life as a participant in the women's liberation movement, left politics and the creative radical culture of a decade in which freedom and equality seemed possible. She reveals the tremendous efforts that were made to transform attitudes and feelings, as well as daily life.

After addressing the first British Women's Liberation Conference at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1970, she went on to encourage night cleaners to unionise, to campaign for nurseries and abortion rights. She played an influential role in discussions of socialist feminist ideas and her books and journalism attracted an international readership.

Sheila Rowbotham: In Hope and Struggle- Tribune article



The pandemic seems to be entering a new phase as Omicron has taken hold. Is it milder? And how might we make decisions based on the latest data?

Predictions that lockdowns might lead to a baby boom have proven wrong - in fact fertility is falling.

We re-examine a baffling claim about the number of children being abducted every year in the US after claims by a Republican politician on social media, and we run our statistical measuring tape up the inside leg of the government's promise to give everyone a booster jab before New Year's Day.

The Death of Nuance - five lectures that seeks to explain how opinions have become so polarised.

Oliver Burkeman has been concerned for a while that Nuance has been vanishing from public discourse. For a long time, he thought it was just other people's problem. But now he realises that even he himself is losing the nuance that was integral to his view of the world.

Islands of Abandonment by Cal Flyn -Radio 4

Book of the Week. Cal Flyn writes about abandoned places: ghost towns, exclusion zones and post-industrial hinterlands - and what happens when nature is allowed to reclaim them.

The episode on Detroit is particularly interesting.