

The Plebs News



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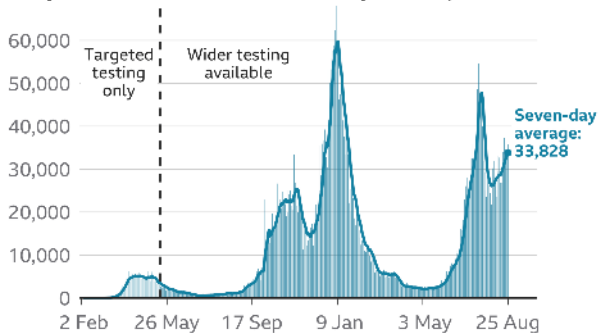
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September 2021

And the Covid Shambles Continues: Cases Rise as Vaccine Wanes

Signs of small rise in new cases

Daily confirmed coronavirus cases by date reported

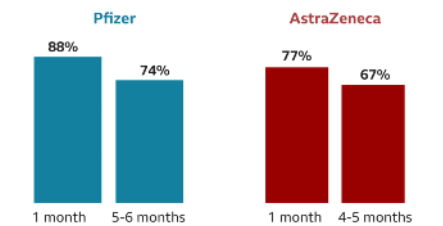


Source: Gov.uk dashboard, updated 25 Aug

BBC

How protection from Covid infection reduces over time

Survey suggests Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines become less effective



Source: Zoe Covid Study app

BBC

Newspaper headlines: 'Freedom day farce' and PM's isolation 'flip flopping'

The Government was forced to backtrack yet again on its so called 'Freedom Day' and returned to urging caution and 'common sense' after warnings from health experts of the danger of increased infections. They were also accused of flip flopping as the PM and Chancellor were both 'pinged' by the track and trace app and initially refusing to isolate. The PM eventually agreed to isolate but managed to make it to Chequers, his 16th century mansion set in a 1000 acres, rather than his flat above Downing St.

Labour conference fringe

No one is safe until everyone is safe

27 September 12.45pm

Fighting vaccine apartheid and for safe workplaces

Online meeting – register here:

<https://rebrand.ly/zn17lzh>

Labour conference fringe

No one is safe until everyone is safe

27 September 12.45 pm BST

Register here: <https://rebrand.ly/zn17lzh>

An online meeting to discuss opposing vaccine apartheid and campaigning for safer workplaces

Fatima Hassan – Health Justice Initiative (South Africa)

Nick Dearden – Global Justice Now

NEU speaker TBC

Chair: Joan Twelves – Zero Covid

[ZERO COVID]

What is Independent SAGE?

Indie Sage is a group of scientists who are working together to provide independent scientific advice to the UK government and public on how to minimise deaths and support Britain's recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. They are led by Sir David King, the former chief Scientific Adviser to the UK government, who chairs the group and oversees its reports. <https://www.independentsage.org/independent-sage/>

Our New CLP Banner Has Arrived



Last year we decided that our presence at community events, marches and picket lines should be recognised by the addition of a CLP banner. After much debate over designs, materials and size it was decided that rather than go for a modern screen print we would commit to a more bespoke piece of art representing the traditions of the party and trade unions. The initial design work was carried out by Simon Atherton, a local Sheffield freelance graphic designer whose company [Turnstone Bold](#) create eye-catching layouts, maps and illustrations for companies and organisations large and small and has previously produced materials for the National Trust.

“ It is always good to work on projects from the local area and for local organisations. The banner has strong and positive images of both Sheffield landmarks, its history and its people. I can’t wait to see the banner in action on the streets of Sheffield” said Simon.

Simon’s work was then passed on to Ed Hall one of the country’s leading banner makers with 30 years experience and with hundreds of banners under his belt. His final design and artwork is in the tradition of British trade union banners. Hand-sewn union banners are unique to these islands, perhaps because – this is Ed’s theory – in Catholic Europe, people put their efforts into stitching for saints' days: "When the trade unions came along, they adopted the pictorial imagery of the Bible – rising suns and so on – without having to worry about the church. I have been making trade union campaign and exhibition banners for 30 years. They are handmade, stitched, appliqued and often with painted scenes as centrepieces. I studied architecture at Sheffield university, and gained my trade union experience as Branch Secretary of Lambeth Union in the 1990s so to do a banner for Sheffield Labour was a pleasure.



Ed Hall- Banner Maker who has worked with Turner Prize winning artist Jeremy Deller on the art of protest for over a decade.

Our New CLP Banner Has Arrived (cont)



Left: Some of Ed's banners at the Banner Culture Exhibition among 230 hung in the former Brierfield weaving Shed in Pendle. Right: with Jeremy Deller in front of Hall's banner for the South Yorkshire branch of Unite at the V&A's Disobedient Objects show. Ed's work also featured at Banksy's Dismaland

Why we carry our banners

For some, trade union and labour banners are a symbol of the history of struggle that has passed and has been superseded by the movement's Parliamentary activity. But for many the beginning of campaigns and resistance very much begin outside the walls of Westminster. Our present and history have never been fairly represented by mainstream media or the ruling class and our banners tell our stories and our histories. Banners have been carried through both victories and defeats and represent the solidarity needed to maintain our causes. Ed recognises that in his depiction of his banner centrepieces. Ed's banners represent the best of this tradition.

"A picture paints 1,000 words and that's what I hope to do with my banners — to tell the story of the trade union movement and injustice when the right-wing media won't," he says. His banners reflect both past and current struggles.

"It's a bit like the Tolpuddle Martyrs. They were transported to Australia for swearing an oath but farmers were doing that to retain prices and wage levels.

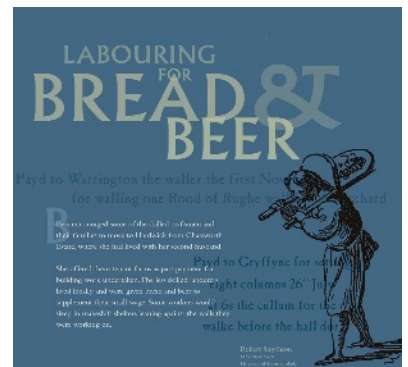
"In the whole of the 1840s, there were prosecutions for working-class people who were swearing oaths but were there any for the landowning farmers who did the same?"

"Whatever the political atmosphere of the right-wing media there is always a pulse, something going on under the surface. The life of a banner starts with me making it but when the banner is involved in a strike, taken out for May Day or used at a protest it develops a story of its own and gains an iconic memory." [Full article](#)



Left: The Tin Plate Workers banner is one of the earliest examples of trade union banners in the Peoples History Museum.

Right : Design work by Turnstone Bold on the history of Hardwick Hall



Marching

Marching and marching and marching,
stubbornly marching,
ever since 1964, marching and marching,
here I met my girlfriend,
marching I met my friends,
marching I carried petitions,
marching I broke my shoes,
marching I lost a jacket, the best one
I had, I left it behind with the banners,
marching I will leave my bones, my legs got swollen,
I will get backache,
every time we march
we don't overstep the mark,
under the ground
our dead applaud,
we undid the march,
and marched in the opposite direction,
going backwards we arrived
at the starting point,
I had more friends than ever,
they were times of strength
and a lot of love,
this is where I met my girlfriend,
I said excitedly
tomorrow, we will go back to the march,
and still today, tirelessly,
we go on marching.

Eduardo Embry is a Chilean poet who was imprisoned during the 1973 US-instigated coup led by Augusto Pinochet against the democratically elected president Salvador Allende in Chile, which saw tens of thousands of trade unionists, militants and supporters of the left murdered in an orgy of political cleansing. He has lived and worked in Britain since being granted political asylum in the late 1970s and his verse collections have been published in Britain, Chile and Venezuela. This poem is from a bilingual collection to be published later in the year by Smokestack Books.

Labour's Angela Rayner unveils plans to make flexible working 'a force for good' for all workers

Labour has today unveiled its plans to make flexible working “a force for good” for all workers as part of their plans to deliver a new deal for working people that makes Britain the best place to work.

Labour is calling for:

- The right to flexible working for all workers as a default from day one of employment and an accompanying duty on employers to accommodate this where there is no reason a job cannot be done flexibly and remotely
- The right to flexible working to include: flexible hours ('flexi-time'), compressed hours, staggered hours, annualised hours, and flexibility around the school day and other family and caring responsibilities, including childcare during school holidays
- Ending one-sided flexibility so all workers have stable, secure employment and mutually-agreed predictable working hours and shift patterns so they can plan their lives
- The 'right to switch off' and disconnect from work at home outside of working hours
- Greater access to workplaces, including to home workers, for trade unions to ensure fair flexibility for all is delivered through a collective voice for all staff, including those who are working flexibly or remotely

Angela Rayner, Labour Deputy Leader said:

“Flexible working is not just about working from home, it is about a fundamental change to working practices to improve the lives of all working people. Flexible working means work fitting around people's lives, not dictating their lives.

“Labour will make flexible working a force for good so that everyone is able to enjoy the benefits of flexible working, from a better work-life balance to less time commuting and more time with their family.

“The ‘new normal’ after this pandemic must mean a new deal for all working people based on flexibility, security and strengthened rights at work.

“The right to flexible working will change our economy and the world of work for the better, stop women losing out at work or even dropping out of the workforce altogether, end the sexist assumption of Dad being at work in the factory or office and Mum looking after the kids at home and improve the lives of millions of workers.”



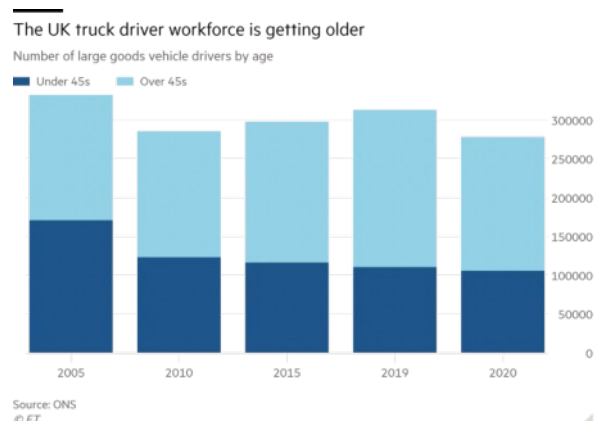
Andy Macdonald and Angela Rayner lead for Labour on employment issues and call for a “new normal” in the workplace

Jobs, wages and conditions back on the political agenda in a big way

The Labour Party was formed as a vehicle to represent workers against employers unwilling to pay proper wages and to treat workers in a civilised way. A shortage of labour is blamed on Brexit, worker laziness and unwillingness to take on dirty and unpleasant jobs rather than looking at the failure of labour market regulation and the traditional exploitation of workers. A number of high profile labour disputes around fire & rehire, the gig economy and underpaid public sector workers have come into the news. Here are a number of articles that highlight some of the issues.

UK truck driver shortage signals a broken labour market sarah.oconnor@ft.com

Sarah O'Connor August 24 2021



A shortage of truck drivers has led to empty shelves in British supermarkets. There is even talk of the army being called in to help. For those who wanted the UK to remain in the EU, it feels like a moment to say: “We told you so, Brexit was a disaster.” But that misses the point. The empty shelves are a visible message from a workforce that’s usually invisible. They tell a story about what’s gone wrong in this corner of the 21st-century economy — and not just in the UK.

Earlier this year Dominic Harris, who had been a truck driver since 2012, started to feel dizzy and unwell. He went to hospital, where a nurse told him his problem was exhaustion. There are legal limits on driving hours: heavy goods vehicle drivers can usually only drive for nine hours a day (currently 10 because of the shortage).

But that doesn’t mean the shifts are nine hours long. It was typical for Harris, who is 39, to be out of the house for 12 to 15 hours a day. When he got home, he was so tired he would go straight to bed. “I’ve lost quite a few relationships with friends,” he says. “I’ve not been the same old Dom.”

Hours can also be unpredictable. A current job advert from XPO states: “You’ll be working a minimum of 45 hours per week on an ‘any five from seven-day’ shift pattern, so your working days may change each week and could include weekend working. You will also be starting early morning and must be prepared to work through the night.”

In spite of the tough hours and the fact they often pay for their own qualifications (Harris paid £1,500), drivers have been slipping down the wage ladder. In 2010, the median HGV driver in the UK earned 51 per cent more per hour than the median supermarket cashier. By 2020, the premium was only 27 per cent. They have faced a particular pay squeeze in the

past five years: median hourly pay for truck drivers has risen 10 per cent since 2015 to £11.80, compared with 16 per cent for all UK employees. “Why would I want to be a truck driver, with all the responsibility, the long, unpredictable hours, if I can go to Aldi and earn £11.30 an hour stacking shelves?” says Tomasz Oryński, a truck driver and journalist based in Scotland, who is planning to move to Finland.

Kieran Smith, chief executive of Driver Require, a recruitment agency, says employers have pushed labour costs down to compete for powerful customers such as supermarkets. “Customers have enormous purchasing leverage [and] they have nailed down the haulage companies to the tiniest margins.” He says lots of drivers leave in their 30s because the hours make it almost impossible to participate in bringing up children, yet the wage isn’t high enough to support the other partner staying at home.

As a result, the workforce is ageing. In 2000, there was an even split between over-45s and under-45s. Now the over-45s account for 62 per cent. Between 20,000 and 40,000 people pass their tests to become truck drivers in a non-pandemic year, but many appear to leave the sector. Harris left this summer to start a business tending graves. It’s peaceful and he likes the connections he makes. He doesn’t want to go back.

Ageing workforces and labour shortages are problems in other countries too. In Europe, some eastern European companies are sending drivers to work in western countries on eastern rates of pay.

In the UK, the extent of the problem was masked before Brexit by a supply of EU drivers who helped to fill vacancies. In addition, a loophole in the UK’s badly-regulated labour market allowed drivers to set up as limited companies. This upped their take-home pay by cutting their tax (at the cost of their workers’ rights). This year the government closed the loophole, which prompted some drivers to leave. Meanwhile, Covid led to cancelled tests for new drivers and prompted many Europeans to go home.

Adrian Jones of the union Unite says the short supply means drivers now have a moment of leverage. He wants to see long-term reforms such as in the Netherlands, where a collective agreement is negotiated between employer and union groups which sets a floor on pay and conditions across the sector. “This collective agreement becomes law, so it gives transport suppliers the ability to say to their customers: this is law, so I can’t go cheaper than this,” says Edwin Atema from Dutch union FNV.

But some employers still seem intent on short-term fixes. Tesco is offering new drivers a £1,000 bonus and a “market supplement” over a six-month period. “All temporary incentives are at Tesco’s discretion and subject to review, variation and removal,” the job advert warns.

The story of Britain’s empty shelves, like that of its unpicked strawberries and unprocessed chickens, is the story of how migration combined with a weakly regulated labour market and hugely powerful retailers have allowed some goods and services to become unsustainably cheap. The system shaved money off our shopping bills but it wasn’t resilient. Remain voters are right to say Brexit helped to cause the current crisis, but wrong to say everything was fine without it. Brexit voters are right to say migration helped suppress driver pay, but as the Netherlands shows, Brexit wasn’t the only way to resolve it.

The labour shortages are a moment of reckoning. If we just use them to bicker about Brexit, we’ll drown out the real lessons in the noise.

Exposed: European trucking's systemic exploitation of workers

The ITF is working with its unions in Europe to expose the hidden shame of Europe's road transport industry. Drivers from Eastern Europe are brought to Western Europe to drive, they receive an hourly wage as low as EUR1.70, they have to sleep in the cab of the truck for up to eight months at a time, they wash and cook in car parks, they have limited access to toilet facilities, and are given fake papers to evade authorities. All the while they transport goods for some of the most successful and profitable multi-national companies in the world.



The grim reality of the European road transport sector

Mass exploitation and inhumane working conditions are rife within the European road transport sector. Companies eager to make a profit at any cost take advantage of the high demand for road transport. They charge large multi-nationals a decent price for operating their supply chains, but the money paid for the service is not fairly distributed to the drivers carrying out the work.

Instead the transport operators use loopholes to underpay their workers, taking drivers from Eastern Europe on Eastern European contracts and using them to drive exclusively in Western Europe. This business model means they are able to pay low wages and social security contributions, while taking advantage of the right for EU members to work all over Europe.

For the last three years the ITF has been working in partnership with European affiliates to investigate the supply chains and the companies that are using these exploitive business models. Through field research and talking to the drivers we have found a pattern of exploitation consistent across the industry.

Aren't there laws to prevent this?

Yes, the European Union (EU) has issued several directives that state that this practice is illegal, but while the laws exist there is little or no enforcement.

Even in countries like France, where more strict checks are carried out, these rogue transport operators simply issue fake documents to deceive the authorities. French law requires that if you work in France you are paid the French minimum wage, but drivers are issued false paperwork to show the French authorities that they are earning French wages - when they are not. While clearly illegal, the drivers do as they are told for fear of losing their job.

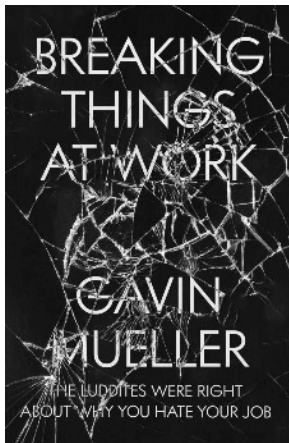
It gets worse – human trafficking

Not satisfied with exploiting the low wages of Eastern European workers, road transport operators now advertise for drivers from the Philippines. Workers arrive to find no apartment, wages of EUR300 a month and the cost of the flight deducted from their pay check. They are forced to live in the cab of their truck, pressured to work long hours without proper rest and threatened by their employer when they try to leave. Groups of Filipino drivers have been rescued from these conditions in the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany but still more are arriving and the agencies continue to advertise these jobs.

Exploitation and worker resistance is alive and well in the 21st century.

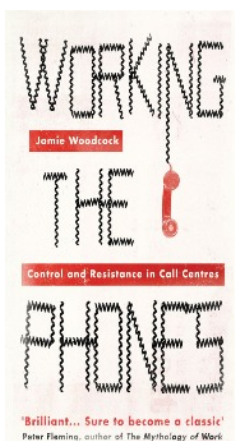
I was once told by Hilary Benn that old fashioned workplaces like factories no longer existed and I had to move with the times. But exploitation and good old fashioned industrial relations has not disappeared and a number of new books highlight how exploitation and worker resistance has taken new forms but is still much informed by history.

Breaking Things at Work: The Luddites were right about why you hate your job- Gavin Mueller



In the nineteenth century, English textile workers responded to the introduction of new technologies on the factory floor by smashing them to bits. For years the Luddites roamed the English countryside, practising drills and manoeuvres that they would later deploy on unsuspecting machines. The movement has been derided by scholars as a backwards-looking and ultimately ineffectual effort to stem the march of history; for Gavin Mueller, the movement gets at the heart of the antagonistic relationship between all workers, including us today, and the so-called progressive gains secured by new technologies. The Luddites weren't primitive and they are still a force, however unconsciously, in the workplaces of the twenty-first century world.

Breaking Things at Work is an innovative rethinking of labour and machines, leaping from textile mills to algorithms, from existentially threatened knife cutters of rural Germany to surveillance-evading truckers driving across the United States. Mueller argues that the future stability and empowerment of working-class movements will depend on subverting these technologies and preventing their spread wherever possible. The task is intimidating, but the seeds of this resistance are already present in the neo-Luddite efforts of hackers, pirates, and dark web users who are challenging surveillance and control, often through older systems of communication technology.



Over a million people in the UK work in call centres, and the phrase has become synonymous with low-paid and high stress work, dictatorial supervisors and an enforced dearth of union organisation. However, rarely does the public have access to the true picture of what goes on in these institutions.

For *Working the Phones*, Jamie Woodcock worked undercover in a call centre to gather insights into the everyday experiences of call centre workers. He shows how this work has become emblematic of the shift towards a post-industrial service economy, and all the issues that this produces, such as the destruction of a unionised work force, isolation and alienation, loss of agency and, ominously, the proliferation of surveillance and control which affects mental and physical well being of the workers.

By applying a sophisticated, radical analysis to a thoroughly international 21st century phenomenon, *Working the Phones* presents a window onto the methods of resistance that are developing on our office floors, and considers whether there is any hope left for the modern worker today.

Working the Phones, Workers Inquiry and and Italian Workerism.

In *Working the Phones* the author Jamie Woodcock carried out his research by going undercover to try and investigate the modern workplace from the perspective of the worker. In the book he invokes the tradition of Italian Workerism, or Operaismo, and the technique of Worker Inquiry to validate his research. But who or what is Operaismo and what is its history?

The car industry and its intensive work and speeded up production lines has always provoked worker resistance as workers lose any meaning or involvement in their work.

During the period known as Italy's "hot autumn" a new type of industrial struggle came into the frame of resistance: a massive wave of strikes between 1969 and 1970 that affected the northern industrial centres of Italy. In particular it focused on Fiat's Mirafiori plant in Turin, which by the late 1960s was a powder keg ready to explode. The plant employed 50,000 workers, with an annual staff turnover of between 10% and 60% of these workers, many who came from the Italian south. Introduced to the new discipline of factory labour, these workers soon came into violent conflict with the bosses. Unlike skilled workers, traditional union members, and the representatives of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), they saw no value in work. These workers practised the 'refusal of work': (as identified in *Working the Phones* and by many workers in the gig economy) carrying out wildcat strikes and making 'impossible' demands, like 'we want everything'. The workers were living an experience of continuous struggle: a rolling wave of strikes and protests that became a daily experience of violent conflict. One militant of Potere Operaio would later reflect, from prison in 1980, that the group was 'caught in the eye of the hurricane'. This refusal of work would excite the theorists and militants of Italian Operaismo ('workerism') and what would later, in 1973, become Autonomia Operaia ('Workers' Autonomy'). Fiat Has Branded Me

Workers Inquiry is a method of research using evidence gathered by workers themselves or through the eyes of workers. The inquiry consists of up to a hundred questions and seeks to understand the work process and psychology of the workers and to frame a means of resistance to automation and Taylorism and, finally, the end to "wage slavery".

Undercover research has been used in the field of industrial relations throughout the history of the factory and very often discovers a very different view of the workplace and practices than that of those managing it. Two famous studies of workplace "restriction of effort" were carried out by Lupton in British industry and Roy in the US engineering industry with both discovering differing psychology of the workplace.

Anyone familiar with the role of "time and motion" in the workplace will be understand the change in worker behaviour with the arrival of the man/woman with the clipboard. Many of the lorry drivers now leaving the industry quote the micro management, exploitation and the "spy in the cab" as one of the reasons for leaving. There is no shortage of drivers as the Road Haulage Assoc. Acknowledge - there are 170,000 drivers holding a licence but not currently using it. All it needs is a change in employment practice to persuade them to return.

On the Shop Floor: Two Studies of Workshop Organization and Output By T. Lupton

Quota Restriction and Goldbricking in a Machine Shop - Donald Roy

Manufacturing Consent:- Changes in the Labour Process Under Monopoly Capitalism

The Great Game of Smashing Nations

By John Pilger

As a tsunami of crocodile tears engulfs Western politicians, history is suppressed. More than a generation ago, Afghanistan won its freedom, which the United States, Britain and their “allies” destroyed.

In 1978, a liberation movement led by the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) overthrew the dictatorship of Mohammad Dawd, the cousin of King Zahir Shah. It was an immensely popular revolution that took the British and Americans by surprise.

Foreign journalists in Kabul, reported The New York Times, were surprised to find that “nearly every Afghan they interviewed said [they were] delighted with the coup.” The Wall Street Journal reported that “150,000 persons ... marched to honor the new flag ... the participants appeared genuinely enthusiastic.”

The Washington Post reported that “Afghan loyalty to the government can scarcely be questioned.” Secular, modernist and, to a considerable degree, socialist, the government declared a program of visionary reforms that included equal rights for women and minorities. Political prisoners were freed and police files publicly burned.

Under the monarchy, life expectancy was 35; 1-in-3 children died in infancy. Ninety percent of the population was illiterate. The new government introduced free medical care. A mass literacy campaign was launched.

For women, the gains had no precedent; by the late 1980s, half the university students were women, and women made up 40 percent of Afghanistan’s doctors, 70 percent of its teachers and 30 percent of its civil servants.

Backed by the West

So radical were the changes that they remain vivid in the memories of those who benefited. Saira Noorani, a female surgeon who fled Afghanistan in 2001, recalled:

“Every girl could go to high school and university. We could go where we wanted and wear what we liked ... We used to go to cafes and the cinema to see the latest Indian films on a Friday ... it all started to go wrong when the mujahedin started winning ... these were the people the West supported.”

For the United States, the problem with the PDPA government was that it was supported by the Soviet Union. Yet it was never the “puppet” derided in the West, neither was the coup against the monarchy “Soviet backed,” as the American and British press claimed at the time.

President Jimmy Carter’s secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, later wrote in his memoirs: “We had no evidence of any Soviet complicity in the coup.”

In the same administration was Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter’s national security adviser, a Polish émigré and fanatical anti-communist and moral extremist whose enduring influence on American presidents expired only with his death in 2017.

On July 3, 1979, unknown to the American people and Congress, Carter authorized a \$500 million “covert action” program to overthrow Afghanistan’s first secular, progressive government. This was code-named by the CIA Operation Cyclone.

The \$500 million bought, bribed and armed a group of tribal and religious zealots known as the mujahedin. In his semi-official history, Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward wrote that the CIA spent \$70 million on bribes alone. He describes a meeting between a CIA agent known as “Gary” and a warlord called Amniat-Melli:

“Gary placed a bundle of cash on the table: \$500,000 in one-foot stacks of \$100 bills. He believed it would be more impressive than the usual \$200,000, the best way to say we’re here, we’re serious, here’s money, we know you need it ... Gary would soon ask CIA headquarters for and receive \$10 million in cash.”

Recruited from all over the Muslim world, America’s secret army was trained in camps in Pakistan run by Pakistani intelligence, the CIA and Britain’s MI6. Others were recruited at an Islamic College in Brooklyn, New York – within sight of the doomed Twin Towers. One of the recruits was a Saudi engineer called Osama bin Laden.

The aim was to spread Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia and destabilize and eventually destroy the Soviet Union.

‘Larger Interests’

In 1985, Afghan mujahideen cross into Afghanistan from a border region of Pakistan. (Erwin Franzen, CC BY-SA 1.0, Wikimedia Commons)

In August 1979, the U.S. embassy in Kabul reported that *“the United States’ larger interests ... would be served by the demise of the PDPA government, despite whatever setbacks this might mean for future social and economic reforms in Afghanistan.”*

Read again the words above I have italicized. It is not often that such cynical intent is spelt out as clearly. The U.S. was saying that a genuinely progressive Afghan government and the rights of Afghan women could go to hell.

Six months later, the Soviets made their fatal move into Afghanistan in response to the American-created jihadist threat on their doorstep. Armed with CIA-supplied Stinger missiles and celebrated as “freedom fighters” by Margaret Thatcher, the mujahedin eventually drove the Red Army out of Afghanistan.

The mujahedin were dominated by war lords who controlled the heroin trade and terrorized rural women. Later, in the early 1990s the Taliban would emerge, an ultra-puritanical faction, whose mullahs wore black and punished banditry, rape and murder but banished women from public life.

In the 1980s, I made contact with the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, known as RAWA, which had tried to alert the world to the suffering of Afghan women. During the Taliban time they concealed cameras beneath their burqas to film evidence of atrocities, and did the same to expose the brutality of the Western-backed mujahedin. “Marina” of RAWA told me, “We took the videotape to all the main media groups, but they didn’t want to know”

In 1996, the enlightened PDPA government was overrun. The president, Mohammad Najibullah, had gone to the United Nations to appeal to for help. On his return, he was hanged from a street light.

The Great Game

“I confess that [countries] are pieces on a chessboard,” said Lord Curzon in 1898, “upon which is being played out a great game for the domination of the world.” The viceroy of India was referring in particular to Afghanistan. A century later, Prime Minister Tony Blair used slightly different words.

“This is a moment to seize,” he said following 9/11. “The Kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again. Before they do, let us re-order this world around us.”

On Afghanistan, he added this: “We will not walk away [but ensure] some way out of the poverty that is your miserable existence.”

Blair echoed his mentor, President George W. Bush, who spoke to the victims of his bombs from the Oval Office: “The oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America. As we strike military targets, we will also drop food, medicine and supplies to the starving and suffering ... “

Almost every word was false. Their declarations of concern were cruel illusions for an imperial savagery “we” in the West rarely recognize as such.

Orifa

In 2001, Afghanistan was stricken and depended on emergency relief convoys from Pakistan. As the journalist Jonathan Steele reported, the invasion indirectly caused the deaths of some 20,000 people as supplies to drought victims stopped and people fled their homes.

Eighteen months later, I found unexploded American cluster bombs in the rubble of Kabul which were often mistaken for yellow relief packages dropped from the air. They blew the limbs off foraging, hungry children.

In the village of Bibi Maru, I watched a woman called Orifa kneel at the graves of her husband, Gul Ahmed, a carpet weaver, and seven other members of her family, including six children, and two children who were killed next door.

An American F-16 aircraft had come out of a clear blue sky and dropped an Mk82 500-pound bomb on Orifa’s mud, stone and straw house. Orifa was away at the time. When she returned, she gathered the body parts.

Months later, a group of Americans came from Kabul and gave her an envelope with 15 notes: a total of \$15. “Two dollars for each of my family killed,” she said.

The invasion of Afghanistan was a fraud. In the wake of 9/11, the Taliban sought to distant themselves from Osama bin Laden. They were, in many respects, an American client with which the administration of Bill Clinton had done a series of secret deals to allow the building of a \$3 billion natural gas pipeline by a U.S. oil company consortium.

In high secrecy, Taliban leaders had been invited to the U.S. and entertained by the CEO of the Unocal company in his Texas mansion and by the CIA at its headquarters in Virginia. One of the deal-makers was Dick Cheney, later George W. Bush’s vice president.

In 2010, I was in Washington and arranged to interview the mastermind of Afghanistan’s modern era of suffering, Zbigniew Brzezinski. I quoted to him his autobiography in which he admitted that his grand scheme for drawing the Soviets into Afghanistan had created “a few stirred up Muslims”.

“Do you have any regrets?” I asked.

“Regrets! Regrets! What regrets?”

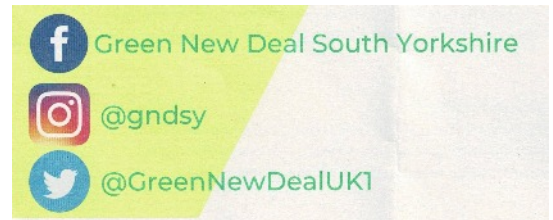
When we watch the current scenes of panic at Kabul airport, and listen to journalists and generals in distant TV studios bemoaning the withdrawal of “our protection,” isn’t it time to heed the truth of the past so that all this suffering never happens again?

John Pilger’s 2003 film, *Breaking the Silence*, about the “war on terror” is available to [view here](#).



Women at Kabul Uni in the 70,s and women protest against fundamentalism in 1998

Labour on the Streets



Members of the labour movement joined the protest against climate change and in favour of a Green New Deal putting good unionised jobs to replace our current dependence on fossil fuel jobs. Street Art performed a parody of this Government's attempts at "greenwash" to an amused but interested crowd who signed petitions supporting the campaign.



Decarbonise the UK

End our dependence on fossil fuels, build an economy based 100% clean energy



Protect and Restore Nature protect habitat and nature. Create carbon sinks, forest, clean air and water.



A Just Transition Create millions of green jobs and guarantee work for those from old fossil fuel industries



Promote Global Justice Do our part in help the rest of the world create fair and healthy economies



Transform the economy Create a financial system that serves the planet and people and not corporations

Remembering Chile- 48 years on

Members of the Chilean community and the labour movement gathered outside the Town Hall to remember friends and comrades lost during the Chilean Coup of 1973. The socialist regime of Salvador Allende was overthrown by military dictator Pinochet aided by US cash and CIA agents.



Why the Chilean Coup is important to us all.

The end of the socialist regime of Salvador Allende and the coming to power of dictator General Pinochet contains significance that goes far beyond the country and people of Chile.

The aid and support of the US allowed Chile became the test bed for the rise of neo liberal economics that spread throughout the world with dire consequences for many. The privatisation of education, water and health, cuts in social provision accompanied by wage and job cuts became the model taken up by the global institutions of the IMF, World Bank and WTO. The rise of neoliberalism from the Chilean Coup is best described in *The Shock Doctrine* by Naomi Klein. In many countries the economic model has been accompanied by economic and social repression by authoritarian regimes.