The Plebs News

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Huge turnout in the Steel City on a day of mass strikes across the UK. Rally off to a cracking start with Bill Adams from TUC Yorkshire & the Humber

Thousands of workers turned out for a huge show of strength in Sheffield this month. They gathered to protest at Government anti strike legislation and to protest at the ongoing cost of living crisis. The rally was addressed by Bill Adams, Regional Secretary of the Yorkshire and Humber TUC, and from workers currently involved in strikes and industrial disputes. If the Government thought that workers would tire of action the latest round of ballot results showed them to be mistaken. Many workers have realised that the strikes are about much more than pay but involve major changes to terms and conditions that will worsen their futures as the Government and employers take advantage of the global economic crisis.

The demonstration involved many young workers taking action for the first time but determined to protect their futures.

- **Royal Mail workers overwhelmingly vote to continue strike action in new ballot**
- **More strike action has been announced by the RMT union. RMT members working for 14 train operating companies will take strike action on the following dates: 00:01 hours and 23:59 hours on Thursday 16 March 2023. 00:01 hours and 23:59 hours on Saturday 18 March 2023.**

  - **NEU teachers strike 28th February Yorkshire**
  - **RCN Nurses 48-hour strikes dates announced 1st-3rd March**
  - **ASLEF Train Drivers win re-ballot for action**
  - **UCU University Staff suspend action for talks**

Amazon workers are striking over pay with GMB Union

Amazon workers Garfield Hilton (left) and Darren Westwood (right) are striking over pay

Amazon chairman Jeff Bezos has a $120bn fortune and has his own space rocket

Amazon workers are staging the first ever UK strike on Wednesday against the online giant in a protest over pay. Around 300 staff walked out at Amazon's Coventry warehouse, the GMB union said, over what they called a "derisory" 5% pay rise to £10.50 an hour.

Workers told the BBC about "severe" conditions, claiming they are constantly monitored and upbraided for "idle time" lasting just a few minutes. Amazon said it has a system "that recognises great performance".

A spokesman said it "also encourages coaching to help employees improve if they are not meeting their performance goals". Two Amazon workers, who are members of the GMB, said the robots in the warehouse "are treated better than us". Darren Westwood and Garfield Hilton described to the BBC how even a trip to the toilet can lead to questions by managers.

"The thing with stopping work is that they want to know why," said Mr Hilton. "So if the time is beyond a couple of minutes they can see it on the system." 'They will question you'

Mr Hilton, who has diabetes, said it is not always possible to find toilets close by in the building and the process of locating one and returning can sometimes take upwards of 15 minutes.

"They will then question you, 'what were you doing?'"

Amazon workers in Coventry voted in December to take strike action

The men said that managers track staff performance, and time that is not spent scanning items is accrued.

Workers at the Coventry warehouse scan stock which is sent out to Amazon fulfilment centres, to be shipped to consumers.

Instead of scanning, workers might be asked to handle pallets. "So when there's problems with a pallet or a box, that time will accrue," said Mr Westwood.

"Technically it could add up to 30 minutes. [The managers] will come down and say, 'during today, you've had 34 minutes of idle time. What were you doing?"

A spokesman for Amazon said: "Performance is only measured when an employee is at their station and logged in to do their job.

"If an employee logs out, which they can do at any time, the performance management tool is paused."

But Mr Westwood and Mr Hilton said some colleagues were working 60-hour weeks to keep up with the cost of living.

Mr Hilton said that he has seen workers falling asleep on the short bus ride to Amazon's warehouse. "There's a huge amount of them in the building virtually in ghost mode."

He said Amazon wants "every minute in that building to be maximised".

"You have to look at it this way, if the box with the product is not moving, you're not making money. This is Amazon. If there's a problem with a box, it's a loss-maker. If the box leaves a building it is making money."

In August, Amazon offered UK workers a 5% payrise, which was worth 50p outside London and the South East.

Inflation, the rate at which prices rise, is at a 40-year high, putting pressure on household budgets.

Bogdan, who is 29, has worked for Amazon since 2015. He said after workers put their health at risk to work during the height of the pandemic, the pay offer "insulted" staff.

He said one reason for striking was the public needed to "understand what is going on" behind the scenes every time they make an order.

He claimed Amazon portrayed an image that "everything is fine", but he added: "It's actually not true."

An Amazon spokesman said it was "proud" of its "competitive" pay rates. He said the starting pay for workers was £11.45 an hour in London and the South East, and £10.50 an hour in the rest of the UK. He said this marked a 29% increase in the minimum hourly wage paid to Amazon employees since 2018.

But union members want to be paid £15 an hour. Mr Westwood said the 50p offer was "a smack in the mouth".

"These people had worked two years through the pandemic, that had seen Amazon's shares go through the roof. They had seen the profits just become unimaginable," he said.

Amanda Gearing, a senior GMB union organiser, told the BBC's Today programme that Wednesday's strike action would have a "massive impact" on the Coventry warehouse.

Of the 1,500 workers at Amazon's Coventry site, around 300 will walk out, the union says.

"Coventry might be the start [of the strikes], but it won't be the finish," Ms Gearing said from the picket line. "We know there are workers in other centres that feel exactly the same."

She added: "People are having to choose between heating their homes and... eating really, so it's not good enough, not from someone like Amazon that's got billions and billions of pounds of profit during the pandemic."

Amazon's global sales and profits soared as Covid restrictions forced people to shop online. Between 2019 and 2020, profits nearly doubled to $21.3bn (£17.2bn) and rose again the following year to $33.3bn.

Growth has been uneven since economies have reopened and after taking on thousands of staff since 2019, Amazon is now laying off 18,000 workers worldwide.

Mr Westwood said "people might think we're being greedy" by asking for £15 an hour. But he pointed to Jeff Bezos, Amazon's founder, executive chairman and space adventurer, who has a $120bn fortune according to Forbes magazine.

"We don't want his boat or his rockets," said Mr Westwood. "We just want to be able to live. I just want to be able to pay my bills at the end of the week. That's all we're asking for."

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos owns Blue Origin, a "space tourism" business

Amazon said a "tiny proportion" of its workforce was involved in the industrial action. It said "only a fraction of 1%" of its UK employees voted in the ballot, which included those who voted against industrial action.

But Mr Westwood said the numbers were "brilliant". Amazon does not recognise unions but, according to the GMB, there are members scattered throughout the UK in varying numbers.

Amazon has been battling against unionisation in the US. More than half of the 8,000 workers at a warehouse on Staten Island, New York, voted to join the Amazon Labor Union which has now been officially certified. However, the company has vowed to appeal the certification.

Mr Westwood said there was a huge range of different nationalities who work at Coventry. "They don't understand this is the UK - we can organise a union, we can protest, we can withdraw our labour," he added. "[Our workers] need someone. I know it's going to be a long slog, but these people need someone who's not frightened. And I'm not frightened."

Sexual Harassment Rife in “hospitality industry”

BBC.COM
McDonald's manager 'exposed himself in front of me'

Christine was working at a South London branch of McDonald's in 2018 when, she says, she was sexually harassed by a manager. The number of complaints of sexual harassment made by McDonald's workers in the UK is unclear, but four years ago the union representing the company's employees, the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU), said it had received 1,000 of them.

McDonald’s has now reached a monitoring agreement with the EHCR (Equality and Equal Rights Commission) but will not recognise trade unions and insists on confidentiality agreements if any settlement is reached with workers complaints. A new report in the Spring will reveal the scale of the problem and why the EHCR may not solve anything.

But the key arguments as to why the issue is so prevalent in this sector are the following:

* Widespread use of insecure contracts which means your hours can be cut for raising complaints

* Disproportionate recruitment of very young workers, who lack knowledge of or confidence in asserting their rights

* Gender /age disparities mapping on to occupational hierarchies (i.e. male managers, female crew members)

* Lack of access to trade unions

* The often sexualised nature of service interactions

Unless the EHRC agreement has clauses to tackle each of these factors, it is likely to be toothless, little more than a PR exercise for McDonald's.

Historical Byline- Limoges Pottery Workers Strike 1905

PARIS — In the icy winter of 1905, many of the women who hand-painted the world-famous Limoges vases and figurines went on strike in France — not because they were poorly paid or toiled long hours, but because they were prey to the factory overseer’s sexual urges.

Their protest was against the custom, inherited from the Middle Ages, in which bosses (or feudal lords) compelled sexual services from the young women who worked for them.

Equilibrium – and the economic nonsense it represents

Richard Murphy

Amongst the glossary items published this morning is this quite important one on the utterly absurd concept of economic equilibrium. Comments are welcome:

Equilibrium is the state to which classical, neoclassical and neoliberal economists all think that an economy should aspire.

Equilibrium exists at the point where supply and demand within an economy are matched and no participant in that economy has an incentive to change their position because to do so would leave them worse off, meaning that the optimal situation that equilibrium suggests exists will have been foregone.

Theories of equilibrium assume that all participants in an economy are:

- Rational, meaning that they behave consistently.
- Are in possession of perfect knowledge i.e. they not only know what they want to achieve at a point in time and how they might achieve it because they are aware of all the options available to them but are also aware of this information for all time to come.
- Aware that equilibrium is the outcome of a dynamic process that they now wish to halt because an optimal outcome has been reached not only for themselves but all other market participants.

The idea of equilibrium, with the stable state that it implies, is borrowed from physics, where it can be observed. In contrast, economic equilibrium has never been achieved because the conditions for it to do so are quite obviously absurd and contradict all known and observable human behaviour.

Because it is claimed that supply and demand are stable and have delivered both optimal prices and optimal levels of supply at the point at which economic equilibrium happens the theory of equilibrium is necessarily dependent upon and embraces theories of market supply and demand and of the profit maximising firm upon which the foundations of neoclassical economics (are built, as are those of neoliberal economics. These theories are built upon the idea that a firm can accurately predict the demand for its product at each price at which it might offer it for sale and also its own marginal (or total additional) cost of producing each item that it supplies at every possible level of production so that it can equate its supposed marginal cost for an item it makes available for sale with the additional or marginal extra revenue that it will generate from doing so. It is then argued that the firm in question will continue to supply that product until such time as the two are equal.

It is important to note that no firm in history has ever been in possession of this information.

It is also important to note that the only conditions in which they might have this information are those where:

- The products of one firm are incapable of being differentiated from those of another firm so that the consumer is indifferent as to which firm supplies them, which is almost certainly a condition that has never existed.
- There are many firms in a market and each is so small that they cannot influence the price of the product that they make in that market, which is an assumption that contradicts what is now known about the behaviour of even very small numbers in mathematics.
- There are no barriers to entry to firms that wish to make supplies in a market meaning that it is assumed that all firms can have access to the technology, labour and capital that they need to have

possession of to make a product. It is also assumed that each firm who wants it can also have such possession instantaneously if a change in demand for the product requires that additional supply be created it can be delivered instantaneously. These conditions have never existed anywhere, at any time.

The implication of these conditions is that only markets can deliver equilibrium outcomes within economies and what is assumed to be the distortionary activity of government is not required because the optimal position created by a market meeting these conditions cannot be bettered.

Although, as noted, it is impossible that the conditions that might deliver economic equilibrium might ever exist the achievement of this state remains the goal for almost all neoclassical economics and neoliberal economics. The argument that each presents that government interference prevents equilibrium is not based on an analysis of any achieved state of equilibrium but solely upon the assumption that government action will prevent this state being achieved when that is already inevitable because equilibrium will always, as a matter of fact, be impossible to deliver.

It is accepted that neoclassical and neoliberal economists can and do relax the assumptions pertaining to the achievement of equilibrium when undertaking their work, and this cannot be disputed. However, this relaxation is usually undertaken to determine the supposed cost of the sub-optimal outcome that they suggest arises within the economy as a consequence of that sub-optimal behaviour so that they might suggest the gain that might arise if only the perfect market to which they (alone) aspire was in operation. As such these relaxations are largely meaningless.

The concept of equilibrium lies at the very heart of neoclassical, neoliberal and positive economics and so at the very heart of much of the work of the economics profession whilst simultaneously explaining why most of the work of that discipline is as inevitably flawed and destined to fail as that of the alchemists always was. If you work on the basis of flawed assumptions you can never achieve a useful result.

Richard Murphy is Professor of Accounting at Sheffield University and blogs at https://www.taxresearch.org.uk

Fossil fuel giant Shell reveals highest profits in its history

Activists gather at Glengad Beach in Co Mayo as the pipe laying vessel the Solitaire makes its way into Broadhaven Bay

Unions call on government to 'expand windfall tax on energy producers' as public face 40% hike in bills from April

THE government must "get real" on profiteering and increase windfall taxes on oil and gas companies, campaigners and unions urged today as Shell revealed its highest profits in its history.

The oil giant said that core profits rocketed to $84.3 billion (£68.1bn) in 2022 in what is one of the highest gains ever recorded by a British company.

The public face a 40 per cent hike in energy bills from April on top of soaring bills and the cost-of-living crisis.

Following pressure, the government launched a windfall tax, called the energy profits levy, on bumper profits made by producers last year.

Shell said it was due to pay $134 million (£109m) through the levy for 2022, representing just a fraction of its mammoth profit.

It said it expects to pay more than $500m (£405.7m) this year.

But it also announced that it will pay $4bn (£3.2bn) to its shareholders through a new share buyback programme, and will increase dividend payments by 15 per cent.

The TUC called the "obscene" profits an insult to working families.

General secretary Paul Nowak said: "The time for excuses is over. The government must impose a larger windfall tax on energy companies. Billions are being left on the table.

"Instead of holding down the pay of paramedics, teachers, firefighters and millions of other hard-pressed public servants, ministers should be making Big Oil and Gas pay their fair share."

Mr Nowak said that there is nothing stopping Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Chancellor Jeremy Hunt from making the political choice to do so.

Trade unionists have been causing waves across the country in recent months by taking strike action to demand better pay amid the cost-of-living crisis.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said Shell's dividends would "go a long way" towards paying for a 10 per cent wage hike for NHS workers.

She said: “Is the government going to get real about taking on profiteering or, as usual, continue its false propaganda that it’s workers’ wage rises that are causing inflation?”

RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said that the oil and gas industry is “out of control” and called for public ownership.

Campaigners called for more taxes on oil and gas companies, with Debt Justice executive director Heidi Chow warning that the profits are being built “on the back of” millions of households pushed into poverty.

“The government needs to expand the windfall tax on energy producers like Shell to pay off the £2.5bn of energy debt that UK households have already taken on,” Ms Chow said.

And Global Justice Now head of policy Dorothy Guerrero hit out at Shell for “lining the pockets” of shareholders made from a global energy crisis, calling for a new polluters’ tax.

Shadow climate change secretary Ed Miliband accused Mr Sunak of being “too weak” to stand up to oil and gas interests, adding: “The government is letting the fossil fuel companies making bumper profits off the hook with their refusal to implement a proper windfall tax.”

Green Party energy spokesman Mark Ruskell said the “sickening” profits of oil and gas companies underline the urgent need for a shift to renewables and support households in fuel poverty.

Downing Street said the government “absolutely” understands the anger but added there were no plans to increase the windfall tax.

Shell’s board of directors sued over climate strategy in a first-of-its-kind lawsuit

Sam Meredith

Shell Share Price has moved from £9.33 in Oct 2020 to £25.26 in Nov 2022

Shell’s directors are being personally sued for allegedly failing to adequately manage the risks associated with the climate emergency in a first-of-its-kind lawsuit that could have widespread implications for how other companies plan to cut emissions.

Environmental law firm ClientEarth, in its capacity as a shareholder, filed the lawsuit against the British oil major’s board at the high court of England and Wales on Thursday.

It alleges 11 members of Shell’s board are mismanaging climate risk, breaching company law by failing to implement an energy transition strategy that aligns with the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement.

The claim, which has the backing of institutional investors with over 12 million shares in the company, is said to be the first case in the world seeking to hold a board of directors liable for failure to properly prepare for the energy transition.

“Shell may be making record profits now due to the turmoil of the global energy market, but the writing is on the wall for fossil fuels long term,” Paul Benson, senior lawyer at ClientEarth, said in a statement.

“The shift to a low-carbon economy is not just inevitable, it’s already happening. Yet the Board is persisting with a transition strategy that is fundamentally flawed, leaving the company seriously exposed to the risks that climate change poses to Shell’s future success — despite the Board’s legal duty to manage those risks,” Benson said.

The UK does not need a digital currency: the vanity of central bankers does

Richard Murphy

There is much discussion in the media today about the possibility that the Bank of England might create a digital currency for use in the UK by 2030.

I stress that all of this is speculation. No final decision on the development of such a currency will be taken until 2025. It will not, therefore, be the responsibility of the current government. Given the near certainty that the Tories will be out of office at the next election this means that, like almost any announcement that the current government now makes, the current speculation is essentially meaningless.

This does not mean, however, that this issue is not worth thinking about, although to spend more than a few minutes on it is a waste of time: there is no evidence that we require a digital currency in the UK.

The most obvious reason for saying this is that we do already have a digital currency in this country. Excepting the £80 billion or so of notes and coins that are in circulation all the money that we now have is electronic, and so digital. The only record of its existence is a digital entry in a computer maintained by a bank that produces statements of the sums owing to and from that bank. Those balances, which are without any form of physical asset backing of any sort whatsoever, are digital currency. The question as to why we need another digital currency is, in that case, hard to answer.

One answer that central banks provide for pursuing this issue is that they must provide a legitimate alternative to cryptocurrencies. This is obviously disingenuous. Given that almost no one has ever used a cryptocurrency to actually settle a real liability, at least in the normal course of trade, a digital currency is not required as an alternative to any crypto asset.

When the Bank of England is also making clear that any digital currency it creates will not carry any interest rate and will be denominated in sterling it also becomes very obvious that the digital currency that they will create will have none of the attraction of the supposed cryptocurrencies now in use. The supposed appeal of cryptocurrencies is in their speculative worth, even though much of that appears to be entirely illusory (to use the kindest possible words). In that case, it is glaringly apparent that any central bank-created digital currency without any speculative value to it and without a rate of return paid on it is not an alternative to cryptocurrencies. To pretend otherwise is to be disingenuous.

So, what is the reason for a central bank created digital currency? The only one that appears to be available is to replace cash. The claim would appear to be that digital currencies will be available to anybody who wants them, albeit through a commercial provider, and not apparently direct from the Bank of England. They will be issued in what are being called digital wallets. I think those already used to making payments from their phones are already in possession of these, and quite how these digital wallets will in practice differ from a charge card is hard to work out.

In that case, digital currencies answer no known question unless that question is "how do we get rid of notes and coins?" Even then, however, quite how a digital currency will really work is hard to know. Are children to be forced to carry digital wallets? Similarly, will those mainly older people who still like to use cash just be told to give it up and instead use a digital wallet when that might very well be alien to them? And is the population as a whole willing to give up cash as yet? I am not sure it is, even though, somewhat to my own surprise, I now go for long periods without ever using it. I am not sure there are any good answers to these questions as yet.

That might be, especially true, if, as is likely introduction of a digital currency to replace notes and coins is really designed to, firstly, permit the possibility of negative interest rates, because the alternative of holding cash will have been eliminated and, secondly, to permit all transactions within the economy to be traced digitally, increasing the likelihood of tax compliance, albeit centrally imposed, and with significant resistance arising.

This then leads to the political questions within this proposal. Is any government willing to take the risk of introducing a digital currency to replace cash and accept the risk of political backlash from doing so?

And is any government actually so keen to introduce a digital currency, and so eliminate cash, that it is actually willing to drive people into the hands of much less stable currency providers so that those who do not wish the government to have access to information on all their transactions can continue to hide them from scrutiny (at least in their own imagination)? I think that the appeal of such currencies will rise significantly if the government tries to eliminate cash.

Finally, there is a curious macroeconomic twist to this. What is currently being made clear is that this digital currency will not be an alternative to a banking service. All that a digital wallet will apparently do is hold digital currency that is equivalent to cash. No interest will be paid. There will be no overdraft facility. There will be no loan facility. There is, then, no banking arrangement, as such, although it is being suggested that commercial banks will actually issue these digital wallets, although why they would wish to do, so is hard to see. In that case, all that is being provided is a quite limited opportunity to deposit some funds with the Bank of England as an alternative to depositing them with a bank itself. That, however, by default means that government borrowing increases, because this is lending to the government and that always increases the national debt. I wonder if anyone in the government has thought this through because it shatters the myth that there is no money?

In summary, what the government is proposing is incoherent, makes no banking sense, makes no macroeconomic, sense, answers, no known problem, and would appear to be a dead cat issue, dumped on the table to distract from the reality which is that the Bank of England is currently trashing the UK economy by pushing up interest rates, wholly unnecessarily. Unless the government comes up with something much better than this I suspect we are a long way from having a digital currency unless the vanity central bankers demands it.

Bitcoin climate impact greater than gold mining, study shows

The digital currency's disproportionate harm to the climate comes from its reliance on a computing process to verify transactions called “proof-of-work mining”, which requires huge electricity expenditures to participate, rewarding those who carry it out with the chance to win some new bitcoin.29 Sept 2022

https://www.theguardian.com › technology › sep › bitcoin…

What's the purpose of mined and non-mined cryptocurrency?

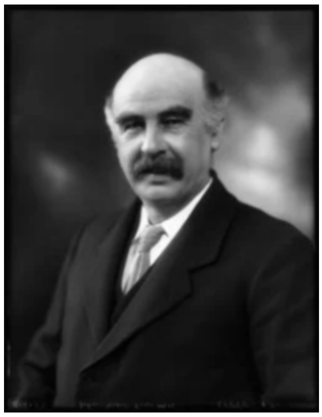
Though they are, by name, opposites, the purpose of mined and non-mined cryptocurrency is the same: validation. Ultimately, each transaction processed over a blockchain network needs to be verified by someone to ensure that the same virtual token wasn't spent twice. In effect, it describes the process of proofing a transaction to make sure it's true. A group of transactions is considered to be part of a "block," and when a block of transactions has been validated, it joins the previously validated blocks to create a chain of true transactions, or a "blockchain."

https://www.fool.com/investing/2018/03/26/the-basics-of-mined-vs-non-mined-cryptocurrency-ex.aspx

John Guest is an example we need to follow today

JON TRICKETT MP looks back at the history of the early Labour Party, where working-class people took to Parliament only to represent the communities where they lived and died, without concern for their careers or personal enrichment

The Yorkshire working class is rooted in the coal mining industry



John Guest MP for Hemsworth

THIS week is the anniversary date of the first general election after the end of World War I.

There is much to learn from that period about the death of an old party — the Liberals — and the growing strength of Labour as an electoral force.

The first woman to be elected to the House of Commons was returned that day, though she never took up her seat.

Constance Markievicz, who was elected for Sinn Fein in Dublin — the only woman elected in the 1918 election — and who subsequently became Europe's first Cabinet member, as minister for labour in Ireland's revolutionary parliament Dail Eireann.

In my own constituency of Hemsworth, the first of a line of working men was elected.

John Guest was a miner, as indeed they all were up to the closure of the mines.

He was a legend here. He and his brother, among many others, helped to build the local miners' association which grew to be the Yorkshire Area of the National Union of Miners.

It is interesting to reflect briefly on one or two incidents in his life. It tells us much about the early Labour Party but also much about what our party should be doing now.

I got to know of him when one day I was visited by his great nephew at my surgery.

His first, confusing, words to me were: "We had one of you in my family."

It soon became clear that his great uncle had been the first Labour MP for Hemsworth.

He explained that Guest had been buried penniless in an unmarked grave in a local churchyard, so we organised a gravestone and eventually had a proper ceremony for him with a couple of NUM banners flying.

The interesting thing was that his older brother's grave which was next to where John's body was interred, was properly marked with a stone.

His brother was a union leader while John was a mere MP; maybe this fact alone revealed the relative importance of these two professions in working-class communities at that time.

My predecessor was born, grew up and worked locally. He was a manual worker first, then a trade unionist and finally an MP.

Three facts stand out from his life. First, when the local employers attempted to set up a fake bosses' union, John and his brother went down to the colliery and persuaded the men to switch into the independent trade union.

Second, when there was a fire underground and some men were trapped on the wrong side of the fire, the mine boss said there was nothing to be done — but Guest took some volunteers underground and broke through the fire in a successful rescue.

Third, closely linked all his life into the working-class communities in our part of the Yorkshire coalfield, Guest repeatedly raised in Parliament the conditions of life which the people here endured.

In 1920, he repeatedly asked about the provision of passenger shelters on the stops of the Dearne Valley Railway.

In the same year he challenged the government on the inadequacy of old-age pensions given the increasing cost of living.

He campaigned against overcrowding and the lack of housing which was affecting public health in the area.

And, in 1921, as a miners' representative, he challenged the home secretary on police violence against peaceful pickets in Woolley and Royston in South Yorkshire.

It's impossible to read about the life of men such as my predecessor without a sense of awe.

Rooted deeply in working-class communities, they never strayed from their identity. They fought all their lives for social justice.

They built a mighty trade union which only the full force of the state under Thatcher could destroy.

And they built a political instrument for change — the Labour Party and the wider labour movement — which challenged the ethical and economic structures of early 20th-century British capitalism.

We stand on the shoulders of true giants. I could not be prouder of the area I represent. But there is something else to say.

These labour movement pioneers did not see the Labour Party as a career structure which they would ascend.

They saw it as an intervention in society designed to transform the lives of the communities from which they had arrived.

They were blunt-spoken, direct in their politics and didn't seek to hide their identity. Guest died in his sister's bedroom in the tiny house where he had grown up.

At a time when Labour is carefully reviewing its own structures and culture following several election defeats, there is much that we can learn from our predecessors.

We need to be deeply rooted back in our communities. We are there to serve those communities. Our elected representatives ought, as far as possible, to be drawn from areas similar to the ones we aspire to represent.

Westminster is no more than a place where we can effect change on behalf of the people we serve, rather than a palace which draws us into its rich embrace.

And, above all, there ought to be no compromise whatsoever with the injustice of privilege, luxury and wealth lying alongside dire poverty, where capital dictates deteriorating social conditions for the many.

Jon Trickett is Labour MP for Hemsworth.

Meet the most powerful Uber driver in India

By Abubakar Idris

For nearly 20 minutes in November 2022, Shaik Salauddin walked alongside Rahul Gandhi, the former president of India's main opposition political party, the Indian National Congress, in Hyderabad. The march was part of Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra ("unite India movement"), in which he walked across 12 states to modernize his party's image, ahead of the elections in 2024. In a video, Gandhi can be seen placing his hand on Salauddin's shoulder as they engage in a deep conversation while passing through the Kukatpally neighborhood of the southern Indian city.

Telangana Gig And Platform Workers Union

Salauddin is neither a powerful politician nor an affluent business tycoon. An Uber driver by profession, over the last three years, Salauddin has become a quasi-celebrity as a gig industry organizer: spearheading strikes, engaging with policymakers, and highlighting issues in the media to help improve the working conditions of his peers. Walking alongside Salauddin sent a strong message to Gandhi's supporters: He is serious about India's unemployment issues. Perhaps Gandhi knew how important it was to be seen with the unofficial leader of millions of gig workers in India.

In 2019, Salauddin co-founded the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT), a coalition of unions that now has over 36,000 members. He currently serves as the federation's national general secretary. In 2020, he also launched the Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union (TGPWU), which now has over 10,000 members, including cab drivers, food and grocery delivery workers, and e-commerce delivery persons from the southern state.

"We aren't getting successes promptly, but have recently started to see some positive changes," Salauddin told Rest of World. "My fight for gig and platform workers will keep going on."

Four tech and gig-work researchers, and several journalists, told Rest of World that Salauddin is the de facto point person for any gig work-related issues. One researcher compared him to the "anchoring contact you have on LinkedIn who knows everybody."

"In terms of ride-hailing, Shaik is the biggest union representative in the country," Balaji Parthasarathy, lead investigator for India at Fairwork, who works closely with Salauddin, told Rest of World. Fairwork is a University of Oxford project that evaluates the working conditions of gig workers of digital platforms.

Salauddin was among the first wave of drivers to start working for Uber and Ola in Hyderabad. He told Rest of World that he decided to join Uber in 2014, lured by the company's prominent advertising campaign and outreach to attract drivers. Prior to this, he used to drive rental taxis. "I spent the first three-four months just understanding what these platforms are," Salauddin told Rest of World during a meeting at his Hyderabad office in June 2o22.

The first few months of working for Uber were smooth, he said, with the company continuing to offer hefty incentives. Many of his fellow drivers bought cars on loan, banking on high payouts from Uber and other ride-hailing platforms like Ola, he said. But the smooth ride was short-lived. As more drivers joined, earnings started to decline.

This drop in earnings led to at least two Uber drivers dying by suicide in Hyderabad, allegedly after failing to pay the equated monthly installments on the cars they had bought for their work. Salauddin remembers watching an ambulance take the dead body of Mohammed Zaheer, one of the Uber drivers who died by suicide in January 2018, to the Uber office in Hyderabad. He spearheaded a protest with hundreds of other drivers in the city at the time, but realized it didn't have the impact he had anticipated.

The deaths made Salauddin reconsider his path as just a driver, he said. He came to believe that companies such as Uber and Ola were exploiting him and his co-workers by setting unrealistic targets, without considering the repercussions. He realized then that gig workers across the country were fighting for their rights in isolation, and they needed to come together to make a difference. So, he started working towards unionizing.

In response to queries sent by Rest of World about Uber's interactions with driver union representatives in India, including Salauddin, a company spokesperson said, "Uber has always met with driver-partners to listen to their feedback about their experience with Uber and ensure we take that into account when making product changes and formulating policies." The spokesperson further said that last year, Uber established a Driver Advisory Council to "bring together driver partners and Uber representatives to formally discuss issues or concerns."

Now, Salauddin doesn't drive for Uber as often as he used to. Instead, he spends his time coordinating with gig workers across states and organizing countrywide movements for gig worker rights and better working conditions.

In June, Rest of World visited Salauddin's brand-new office in Hyderabad. Dressed as always in a button-down shirt and trousers, he sat cross-legged on the floor of the threadbare 400-square-foot office for much of the afternoon. Surrounded by a few plastic chairs and simple tables, Salauddin juggled phone calls, sending messages on Telegram and WhatsApp groups, and meeting local gig workers who came in seeking guidance.

His diary is his lifeline. In it, he scribbles notes during these meetings and keeps a daily timetable. He travels between Delhi, Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Kolkata, where he meets union members, and attends workshops and seminars. Because his car goes mostly unused during the week, he lends it out to other drivers. His last Uber ride was in September 2022, he said.

Salauddin, who has a degree in computer studies, switches between Hindi and English smoothly. He speaks confidently about the "unfair practices of platforms," and frequently refers to "the algorithm" when talking about why gig workers suffer due to apps. Unlike many other union leaders in India, Salauddin is extremely tech- and media-savvy. He regularly keeps in touch with local and foreign journalists, sharing screenshots and press releases via WhatsApp. He's articulate and knows how to build a story.

"Just like policemen have walkie-talkies, we have these Telegram groups."

On the afternoon of Rest of World's visit, Salauddin's phone buzzed nonstop, mostly from Telegram and WhatsApp notifications. He's in at least 64 Telegram groups and over 20 WhatsApp groups — many of which he has created — dedicated to providing a safe space for gig workers to discuss their woes in real time. "Just like policemen have walkie-talkies, we have these Telegram groups," Salauddin said. "Whatever problems we want to discuss, we do it there. We start a movement from there."

The conversations in these WhatsApp and Telegram groups — often through voice notes — eventually become the evidence that Salauddin uses to create press releases, lodge police complaints, and start campaigns against unfair practices by tech companies.

It was in one of these WhatsApp groups that Salauddin learned about the October 2022 incident, where a customer ordering on the delivery app Swiggy explicitly requested a Hindu delivery person, rather than, ostensibly, a Muslim delivery person. Salauddin highlighted the issue on Twitter — where he has over 1,500 followers — and triggered a nationwide debate.

“[We] demand that Swiggy take strict action against such bigotry,” he said in his tweet. “You built your business on the backs of workers and it’s your minimum duty to ensure their safety and dignity at work.”

Salauddin insists that his union, TGPWU, isn’t politically affiliated. But over the course of his work, he has managed to rub shoulders with some prominent politicians like Asaduddin Owaisi, Kavitha Kalvakuntla, M. Shanmugam, Harbhajan Singh, and K. Keshav Rao, among others, he said.

In 2019, during a strike of public and private transport workers in Telangana, the state’s governor, Tamilisai Soundararajan, invited the Telangana State Taxi and Drivers Joint Action Committee to her office. She spoke to Salauddin, the committee’s chairman, and asked him to call off the strike.

In 2020, Salauddin was also able to get the support of some local and state-level politicians to lobby the government to pass a bill on security benefits for gig workers. “I did a lot of internal lobbying to bring the social security code, and many of the politicians I met gave me a letter in support of that,” he said.

The efforts of IFAT and TGPWU have had other successes, too. In the spring of last year, cab drivers on Uber and Ola in India protested against low fares by switching off the air conditioning in their cars. Uber and Ola did not increase drivers’ base fares, but a month later, they agreed to display the drop location to drivers after years of resistance. Much of the mobilization and information-sharing that brought about these changes has been made possible through the Telegram and WhatsApp groups Salauddin is active in.

However, he says his biggest recent win has been getting Gandhi to talk about gig workers. “I thought he would give me five minutes just like he gave others,” Salauddin told Rest of World over the phone in November 2022. “I was a bit worried if this would just be a photo op or [would] actually make a difference — but he engaged with me, asked me a lot of follow-up questions.”

Salauddin claims that for years, Gandhi had never publicly discussed platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, Uber, and Ola, and the conditions of their workers. But, after their walk together, Gandhi has brought up the problems. Publicizing these issues, Salauddin says, drives him. “There’s nothing I can be happier about.”

Reporting for this story was supported by the Pulitzer Center’s AI Accountability Network.

If There’s a Fire In Your Heart

"If there's a fire in your heart

It only needs to be a candle.

Every fire in the world

Started from one spark.

Take the fire in all our hearts-

We will be more than they can handle.

Take my hand in here tonight,

And we will light up all the dark".

Grace Petrie

Markets may deliver a mechanism for determining supply but can it ever deliver social justice. Classical economics declare that ; “In open markets, prices serve a rationing function in determining how much of available quantities each consumer will get.”. Two recent examples show that it can be the thin end of the wedge in bringing social injustice.

Energy suppliers are paying households up to £100 to cut electricity use at peak times this winter

- Only those with smart meters can take part. As the schemes are based on tracking usage during specific times of the day, only those with smart meters can take part, as smart meters are able to send half-hourly readings to your energy supplier.
- You'll be asked to reduce your electricity consumption during certain periods. This is likely to include the evening peak between around 4pm and 7pm – but the exact times will depend on your supplier's scheme and the needs of the electricity grid.
- You could earn up to £100 over the course of the winter. National Grid ESO has previously said it expects to pay suppliers the equivalent of £3 per unit (kWh) saved, but suppliers are able to choose whether to pass on the full amount (or pay more).

Over a million households and businesses have joined energy firm schemes that pay you to cut your usage at peak times, with two official energy cutting events taking place last week. Below we explain how these schemes work, which energy suppliers are offering them and how you can sign up.

The schemes have largely been launched as part of a broader initiative from the National Grid Electricity System Operator (ESO), the body responsible for transporting electricity around England, Scotland, and Wales and keeping homes and businesses powered.

It follows warnings from the operator that this winter could be challenging for energy supplies throughout Europe, though it has stressed blackouts are an unlikely "worst-case scenario".

South Africa’s poorest are staying up all night for cheaper internet rates

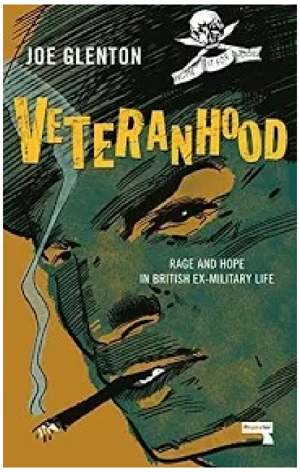
By Mihir Dalal

- **Thousands of internet users in South Africa cannot afford daytime broadband prices and use prepaid internet packages that only allow them to go online at night.**
- **According to experts, this pushes schoolchildren and workers from low-income households to stay up late, which could impact their health.**
- **Due to rolling blackouts, partly caused by power cuts, this phenomenon is impacting wealthier South Africans too.**

Dark Economics: Understanding the Politics of Defence Budgets - Podcast

As the sentiment goes, there always seems to be money for warfare but never quite enough for welfare. So what's the picture in the UK - that tiny collection of islands with its towering defence expenditure. In this episode, we're joined by Matt Fawcett from the Global Campaign on Military Spending UK to discuss the dark economics of Britain's war machine.

Matt talks about the troubling gaps between what Britain spends on its military and what it spends on climate mitigation or carbon reduction targets. Not to mention international aid budgets. He also adds the GCOMS take on NATO spending commitments and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, arguing against the dominant Atlanticist notion that Putin's aggression is due to NATO underspending.

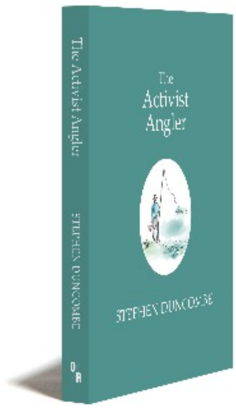


Veteranhood: Rage and Hope in British Ex-Military Life

The military veteran is claimed by all sides. Conservatives, liberals and socialists all want to speak about and for ex-servicemen, yet far-right demonstrations are dotted with berets and medals and ex-military men have become celebrities of the reactionary manosphere.

So who are Britain's ex-servicemen? What do they want? What are their politics? What are the issues which animate them? Are they just irredeemable fascists by dint of their service to Empire? Or is there a radical political potential waiting to be unlocked?

Former soldier Joe Glenton takes us on a guided tour through ex-forces life at the heart of a dead empire as he attempts to demystify military culture, rescue the veteran from his captors, and discover if a more optimistic, humanist mode of veteranhood can be recovered from the ruins.



The Activist Angler

Looking for a retreat during the stress of the pandemic, the activist and teacher Steve Duncombe took up fishing, a sport he had abandoned in his youth. After many years away from his rod, he had to re-learn how to fish and approached the practice with what Zen masters call "Beginner's Mind." Having no recent experience to fall back on, every fish successfully caught or line hopelessly snarled served as a lesson. Hours spent doing little more than casting and retrieving meant plenty of time to think. One of the things Steve thought a lot about was activism. The art of angling, he discovered, has a lot to teach about the art of activism.

The Activist Angler brings together these lessons in an engaging journey from the street to the beach and back. The format is simple: one reflection on fishing followed by another on what might be learned and applied to activism, with each accompanied by an illustration. Topics range from telling fish stories and the trap of activist nostalgia, to the impossibility of thinking like a fish yet the necessity for an organizer to understand their audience, with detours through reflections on self-care, catch-and-release, and taking responsibility for the human cost of one's political actions.

"Beneath the paving stones, the beach!" —Situationist slogan, Paris, May 1968