

Nationalisation is as bad as it ever was

With Labour wanting to complete the nationalisation of the railways and the Conservatives hesitating to privatise, it is time to revisit the general case against public ownership.

The UK's nationalised industries have been bad for customers. Lacking competition they put up prices too much, deliver poor service and fail to innovate in a customer friendly way. They are bad employers, often shedding labour by redundancies as they lose customers. They milk taxpayers, sending all their losses to the Treasury to pay. They make ill considered, expensive and badly managed investments in new capital like HS 2.

The Post Office has behaved disgracefully towards its employees. It bungled a computerisation programme. It has plunged into losses.

HS 2 has been subject to huge cost overruns and then faced a series of cuts to its scope to try to contain costs to three or four times original budget.

The nationalised part of the railway, all the track, signals and stations, has inflicted misery on passengers with endless signal failures, unplanned track maintenance, leaves on the line and the wrong kind of snow. Many of the delays and cancellations stem from nationalised mismanagement.

Nat West/RBS in public ownership has lagged other banks and performed badly.

The Bank of England has proved to be the UK's worst asset manager racking up £170 bn of losses on so called safe bonds it paid too much for.

The nationalised roads offer too little capacity and are bedevilled by temporary closures, congestion, slow running and potholes.