

Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

Change Britain – Embrace Your Party

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Political statement from the Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist, 15th Congress, London, November 2009

Introduction

Our 15th Congress is timely with events in Britain and around the world unfolding extremely rapidly. The British government and the capitalist class internationally want us to believe that the working class cannot change anything, everything is beyond our control. We think differently.

First focus on Britain because it is our place: we can change it but nobody else can. Exactly the same applies to every other country: only its people can change it. Also focus on the present because that is where we are: we can change the present and therefore we can affect the future, but only people living in the future will be able to change it. No one can change the past; everyone can learn from it. We need to see Britain in perspectives of time and space.

What have we learnt?

We can start with an appraisal of what we said before, the tasks we set ourselves. Were we on the right lines?

At our 13th Congress, we issued a challenge to our class. Capitalism is in terminal decline, what are you going to do? Go down with the ship or construct something from the wreckage and strike out for a future? We predicted this financial collapse. We indicted the EU before the workers of Europe as a monument to their own timidity and backwardness. We confronted the denial of responsibility which was all around us within the class.

At our 14th Congress we said the sheer speed of decay is breath taking. Capitalism is a spent force. We also said the class will find solutions when it looks for them. People cannot survive without their material needs being satisfied, so production of goods will take place, which

means a class of producers will exist whether capitalists like it or not. If they stamp out production in one place it will burst out somewhere else. Internationally the working class, the producers of goods, cannot be exterminated.

To the matter at hand: Britain. We have a deep and decisive crisis of capital maturing for over a hundred years since the triumph of finance capital over industrial. There has been a gradual replacement of the industrial foundations of our economy with credit, promises and speculation which deliver a faster buck but are not load-bearing. This edifice will stand for a while but then cracks start to appear. Every government proclamation, initiative or policy is basically wallpaper to cover the cracks, which are everywhere. So it's been a long time coming. Which is not to say "the end is nigh", but the tremors are powerful and close together.

Actually, the struggle between finance and industrial capital goes back to the dawn of capitalism. The world's first stock exchange was in Amsterdam in 1602. Twenty years later, Tulip Mania was the first speculative bubble. Over the next 15 years, tulips became so popular that a futures market was created for traders to buy contracts to buy tulips before the bulbs had even been planted. Bulb prices soared without ever changing hands and within a year the market collapsed and the trade in tulips ground to a halt.

Brown's plan is to save capitalism's bacon. He would have us all embrace a bleak future which is the grim reality for so many already. Of course he doesn't talk about capitalism. He talks about great powers, the EU and the USA, and globalisation, as if that were a thing. The EU is presented as an unstoppable force, a power above nations. Yet his is the only government that acts as though it were so. The British government is the first to instigate and rubber-stamp every EU policy and directive, many of which were written here. The first to punish our people for not loving the EU enough. The question asked in Westminster is not, "is this good for us as a nation?" but "is this what the EU wants?" And now this infantile pre-election jostling about who will be the next government. Who will be the next monkey to the EU organ grinder?

In its terminal state, Capitalism uses the EU as an illusion of vigour and rude health, an impression of power. But it is only as powerful as we allow ourselves to believe it is. Think of the Wizard of Oz. A mighty voice turned out to be that of a wizened little man, artificially amplified. To overcome the fear you had to pull back the curtain and see for yourself.

The stench of political corruption here is almost overwhelming now. The putrefaction of parliamentary democracy in decay is an assault on the senses. The arrogance of members of parliament – "It was all within the rules" – has backfired on them. Workers' natural suspicion of politicians has turned to contempt.

Capital will emerge from this period more damaged and certainly more vicious. Look at the preparations here and elsewhere in the world for riot control, suppression of dissent. Was that show of strength in London in April 2009 to protect "The City" from anarchists, or was it a testing ground for new methods of urban containment? We should always be vigilant about the erosion of civil liberties. Coercion is never for our benefit.

But we have learnt that unemployment is capitalism's favoured weapon of attack on workers. Unemployment, underemployment, agency working, short term working, outsourcing – all designed to weaken a community's root. The party said unemployment is war on workers. It still is. The EU's "free" movement of migrant labour with its associated rootlessness of workers intensifies the attack. If the clarity of the engineering construction workers on this point was truly shared and asserted by the working class as a whole, the forces of capital and labour would be dramatically realigned in Britain. Since last Congress the working class has found a voice to demand of agriculture, "Grow it in Britain". Where is the voice which says of industry, "Jobs now. Make it in Britain"?

Capitalists cannot correct the fatal flaw in their system which makes it obsolete as a force for progress, but they can and do learn lessons. We have had crises of capital before. They end them with a war. Remember that the last Depression ended with (and was ended by) a World War. The last shots fired in that war were the two atom bombs. Will the first shots fired in the next one be nuclear?

So the drums are beating all over the world. Pakistan, Sudan, Somalia, Korea, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan. The list goes on. Workers need to recover that understanding that wars are not accidental or a mistake. They are part of a plan. Here's Major General Smedley Butler, the highest-ranking and most decorated United States Marine in 1935: "...I spent 33 years and four months in active military service and during that period I spent most of my time as a high class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism."

The collapse of the Soviet Union has dramatically increased the prospect of war as a weapon of first resort. A collapse 20 years ago but perhaps unravelling since 1956. It's time to have some perspective on how that collapse has impacted on working class thinking. One thing is clear. We are involved in a very long-drawn out struggle between two classes in which socialism has been proved possible in one country (USSR) and in several countries simultaneously (USSR and others). Our role is to destroy capitalism in Britain.

The working class round the world looked on the Soviet Union with a mixture of admiration and disdain. "They did well for themselves but it's not for us" or "We don't want to be like them but we like their influence in the world." We became reliant and dependent. We used them as a crutch. When the crutch was taken away we staggered about. We'd forgotten how to use our legs. That dependence on the Soviet working class has had consequences on how workers think. Over-reliance promotes a feeling of personal inadequacy and compounds that tendency within the class to refuse responsibility. Because the Soviet Union was a counterweight to unbridled capitalism, to an extent we took our eye off the enemy.

The impact was worldwide with workers tilting at windmills. Look where moves towards secularism have been reversed. The "western world" is now the enemy. In Africa and the Caribbean, dormant forms of medieval thinking are revived, witchcraft, demon possession and the like. In Britain too some workers see scientific advance or climate change as the enemy to be focussed upon. Throughout Europe, some trade unionists argue that nationalism is the enemy and seek to focus anywhere but at home where real change can be made.

Those trying to forge their own workers' nationalism may be quite hard to recognise. What the enemy says may offer a clue. Consider Bush's axis of evil. Consider the favourite targets of the moment: Iran, Cuba, Zimbabwe, Sudan, North Korea, chosen because they refuse to bend the knee. Try to see each country objectively and from a worker's perspective.

There has been an attempt recently to suck us into a voyeuristic and judgemental stance vis-à-vis elections in other countries, usually featuring an alleged opposition movement presented as being on the side of the angels. So Georgia, Burma, Zimbabwe, and again Iran. How would we know? We are not there. Enough of telling other people how to improve their lot. Let them sort themselves out. Our internationalist line is very clear. Fight your own battles, in your own land. And leave us to do the same. The voice of opposition and dissent, whether real or imagined, is lauded to the skies so long as it's far away from the imperialist heartlands.

How well do we know our class?

We have had to struggle in recent years for the right to call a spade a spade, with regard to our class. The inadequacies and shortcoming of British workers have been faced up to with honesty and are well documented.

Many British workers don't recognise themselves as workers and some even deny they are British. This psychological defect has no basis in reality. Materially, because of where we are and our relationship to the means of production, we are British working class whether we like it or not. Yet despite apparent inactivity and lack of self-organisation the class asserts itself when it chooses. The fact that these manifestations are unexpected should cause us to reflect where we are as a Communist Party. Are we as embedded, "in and of", as we once were? Have we moved with the class as it has changed?

How do we measure up to the requirement "advanced detachment"?

Are we advanced? Yes – a unique storehouse of wisdom distilled over generations, with fearless application of Marxism to British conditions. The issue of a "detachment" should not be confused with detached. Are we a unit, a brigade, a section of the class? Do our branch life, education and structures place sufficient emphasis on day-to-day practical collective work? In particular, how are we identifying and engaging with honest worried workers, who have moved beyond an individual response along the lines of "How am I going to get out of this mess?" Are we aware what a powerful impact we can have on people's thinking when we communicate, not shouting or whispering, just talking?

Remember that knowledge is indestructible. People talk to each other and will talk – the truth will out irrespective of how much it is repressed, how many lies are told.

Britain is the inspiration for, and the natural home of, Communism. We have to think of Britain as a small component part of an eventual Communist world. Communism can only exist as a world system; the State cannot wither away in a single country surrounded by others armed to the teeth. Our own advance depends on the advance of workers everywhere.

What next? A call for action

A challenge for us in this coming period, when things will change rapidly and often for the worse, is how to ensure the light of Communism continues to burn in Britain.

Be optimistic. Keep things in perspective. We have survived 40 years. Big deal. The working class has survived for centuries. The tale of socialism in the twentieth century must be written. Our Party may be the sole survivors who remember it and can write it. It must be written from the perspective of a British worker.

Be honest with workers as ever, not deferential. Confront idleness, sloppy thinking, passing the buck and every slippery way of avoiding responsibility. Above all attack fatalism, the most reactionary mode of thought in a modern proletariat. Remember in the Second World War pubs had posters "there will be no pessimism in this house".

We've got a system that doesn't work. Workers know this. We come back time and time again to what does work. Industry, sovereignty, self-reliance, self-protection, it all comes down to control in the workplace and control of our resources. Workers who seek to control their lives recognise that nothing is insurmountable. Pollution is an industrial problem. We will come up with an industrial solution. It is capitalism, not carbon dioxide, which is destroying the planet. Control is not the same as communism but in the hands of a working class it's a good start. And it's not new. Britain introduced the world to the concept of industry, sovereignty, self-reliance. We have fertile soil in both meanings of the phrase.

For some time now we have recognised we have everything we need here to prevent Britain going backwards, notably we have skilled, educated workers, who see the euro for what it is, see the EU increasingly for what it is, see the G20 and the like for what they are, see the Labour Party for what it is. But who don't as yet see with sufficient critical mass what a seismic event it would be for British workers to say we will have a future on our terms.

There is great potential both for progress and for destruction. The ruling class can't rule in the old way. The working class wants to be ruled in the old way. This is impossible. The old way is gone.

Britain is under attack on many fronts. Resist where we can. Be dialectical about it. Guerrilla. High time we outgrew that nursery school approach to conflict, shouting at the wrong enemy. Fight where we are strong. Encourage defiance.

Renew this focus on Britain. Because Britain is under attack we have to defend it, protect it, and cherish it. Much of what is bad in the world started and was influenced by the British ruling class. Much of what is good in the world started or was influenced by the British working class. What is good for Britain will be good for the world.