

peace, jobs, power

Political statement from the 13th Congress of the CPBML, London, 21/22 April 2003

absolute decline

The situation facing workers in Britain today is as grave as at any time in our history. Capitalism, the social system which replaced feudalism, was born here, and now, five hundred years later, is dying before our eyes. British workers made Britain the workshop of the world, and made capitalism seem synonymous with manufacture. That capitalism is now in terminal decay, unable to feed, clothe, house, provide work for or meet the needs of the people of this country. From seeming synonymous with manufacture, capital is now its antithesis.

Against such a backdrop, the workers of Britain bear an awesome responsibility. Go down with the ship or construct something new from the wreckage and strike out for a future.

For there can be no doubt that the ship is holed below the waterline. The veneer of capitalism is cracking, exposing a rotten and corrupt interior. The squandering of profit which could and should be used to re-tool and re-equip industry is a daily scandal. The dividing line between business and criminality has in many areas ceased to exist.

The slow, steady decline of capitalism was given impetus by Thatcher with a premeditated, all or nothing onslaught on British industry. Now we have a Labour government which has taken the onslaught to a new level. "Tough on industry, tough on the causes of industry" might well be their epitaph. And with that comes a second generation of decimation – of Britain's pioneering and indigenous industry, and of its agriculture. Capitalism, an absurdly over-inflated system based on the notion of economic "confidence", has itself no confidence in its own future. Witness the robbery and destruction of pension funds nationwide, with the proceeds exported out of our country and guaranteed pensioner poverty. The clock is turning back 100 years.

international

Internationally, the situation is dire. The long anticipated financial crisis underlines the reality of capitalism's demise, not just here but around the world. The United States, once a byword for capitalist health and vigour, is now reduced to striking a pose as leader of a world crusade. Not, as Bush and Blair would have it, against terrorism, but against any country that dares assert independence, integrity, sovereignty. Top of the most wanted list are those countries that put the needs of their own people first.

US industry is in crisis; the US financial bubble is bursting. Increasingly, these are things that capitalism can no longer fix, so it goes to war because it no longer knows how to do anything else.

What our Party called in 1994 "the irrationality of decaying capitalism" now finds a truly terrible parallel: religious fanatics who would drag us back to feudalism by the use of terrorist murders of workers, striking at random anytime, anywhere. Both are by-products of reaction unleashed by the collapse of workers' power in the Soviet Union. The Afghan communists brought more civilisation to Afghanistan in ten years than had been achieved in the previous thousand. And the Taliban dug up their graves because they knew this.

european union

Closer to home, the war clouds are also beginning to roll as a predatory EU lurches towards its ultimate objective, the unpicking of the post-WW2 settlement and the dissolution of the nation state. European dictat has decreed that the various regions of the EU may have only the industries that suit the pan European model. Hence the apparent inability of successive comprador governments to do anything to arrest the decline of industry here. The greater good of the EU as a concept overrides the needs of member nations in reality. The Labour Party presses on with its mission to be a key player in the "New Europe" – for which they have offered to deliver Britain bound and gagged.

The whole notion of a structure which can exercise power beyond national level needs careful consideration by workers in all the countries concerned. The EU is not a nation. It lacks a common language, a common culture, anything that binds a people together historically. It does not even have a fixed territory. It has no power except that yielded by the member states, who produce everything. Hence the key significance of the single currency, giving the semblance of unity and integrity to a disparate collection of countries, locking in member nations to subservience to Brussels.

In this process the internal and democratic structures of nations are broken up to conform to the shape of the new centralised European state. For Britain this means regionalisation, devolution, a subordinate legal system and less power to local government.

What authority the EU has corresponds directly to the extent to which workers have handed over their capacity and willingness to shape their own destiny. The EU stands before the workers of Europe as a monument to their own timidity and backwardness. It is nothing more than a life support machine for the body of capitalism – why the reluctance to switch it off?

The triumph of the British working class in not as yet succumbing to the blandishments of the single currency needs to be appreciated. More class conscious than our neighbours, we have not yet accepted that Britain is finished as an independent, sovereign, modern nation. But the pressure to do so is immense.

class ideas

The ideas that wrought us as a class are daily, routinely challenged. Industry, the transformation of nature, made us what we are. An essential component of our class understanding is that because of industry, because of production, we have power. We can change things. Side by side, of course, has been the long established belief that we can live with capitalism, perhaps persuading it to evolve benignly. Hence social democracy, the thinking shaped by the power to change things and the simultaneous desire to have someone else direct that power on our behalf. Social democracy could be summed up, "We can change the physical world, but not the social world." Such an inadequate mode of thinking for a great working class now faces a challenge. The status quo, standstill, is not an option. We can either go forwards or backwards.

Presently, the forces to take our thinking backwards are on the rampage. The attack on industry has moved to an attack on the necessity for industry. "We don't need to make things, someone else can do it better/cheaper." Absence of industry breeds a new mode of thought, "We cannot change things."

The assault on the power of workers is evolving from a repudiation of industry to a repudiation of science itself. Hence 'new variant' social democracy presents itself — "We can't change the physical world or the social world". A new way of thinking for a working class going backwards. Thus the promotion of an old, 'flat earth' perspective on scientific development. Look at the debate on gene modification, global warming etc. "Best not tinker with forces beyond our control." The spurious concept of multiple human races, a lie blown wide open by the unravelling of the human genome, still leads the class to chase its tail and divide in the name of opposing "racism". The land that gave us Darwin now boasts schools which repudiate evolution and the theory of natural selection. Dark days indeed.

trade unions

And it has to be acknowledged that the response of the trade union movement, the 'official wing' of the working class, has been woeful. Indeed, the rush to servitude in the Euro has been led by the TUC and once mighty unions within. The reality for British workers is that their own institutions are dominated by the past, hence fondly backward looking, hence backward. The public face of trade unionism in Britain is rejected by younger workers who do not wish to revisit old stamping grounds nor relive past glories.

Whatever the public face, the assessment of trade unions and their strength depends on activity in the workplace. Backwardness in national unions is a consequence of inactivity amongst the membership. Involvement of young workers in trade unions at the workplace is both the challenge and a real gauge of union strength.

And here perhaps the greatest challenge of all, and certainly the greatest opportunity. How to harness the optimism, the will to live, of the young.

Younger workers have rejected the posturing and backwardness of the trade unions and their structures. The responsibility rests with them to take that rejection back into the movement. Shake it up, reclaim it, make its structures work again.

Young workers want a future. But a future as part of the migratory labour force of Europe is no future at all. Not when responsibilities are acquired and roots put down.

The heart of the matter is the acceptance or not of responsibility.

responsibility

Denial of responsibility in many ways characterises the present situation.

The notion of migration, both internal and international, is embraced by many as a means of escaping present difficulty (but only if you can afford it). It produces a weak, disorganised and rootless working class prey to the capitalist market beloved of Thatcher, Blair, EU. The moving out of businesses from Britain – especially to the countries of the old Soviet bloc – is matched by a brutal trade in human beings into Britain, legal and illegal, which robs desperate countries of their skilled workers and imports new criminal fraternities.

Britain's wealth was created by generations of workers. Now others, from other abandoned countries, want to have some of it, young men prepared to pay and risk their lives to come here. The destruction of skilled teams of workers in industries such as railways replaces them with migrant

workers from eastern Europe who do not speak the language and lack the traditions in skill and safety, prepared to work for a pittance. Why do we permit it?

Migration leaves the difficulty unresolved and creates new difficulties elsewhere. It can never be a class response to a problem. As a class we have nowhere to run. We are stuck with Britain and Britain is stuck with us. We are Britain – all of us who live and work here and see our future here. If we must take responsibility for our nation, others must do the same for theirs, the task is the same, stay where you are and fight for a future for your country.

nationalism and internationalism

Being patriotic is often sniffed at now as an outmoded sentiment, tainted with imperialism. The derision fostered by the conceit that we have outgrown the nation state. Well, capital can certainly cross and re-cross national boundaries but we can't. We can and should be proud of Britain because it means being proud of what workers have achieved. Health and education, industrial advance, the flowering of science, are the achievements of workers. So not a rose tinted nationalism, a love of structures, but a workers' nationalism, built on pride and optimism in what workers can and will achieve.

This workers' nationalism provides the basis for a true internationalism – how can we profess to care about the world if we allow our own sovereignty to be handed over, whether to EU or US? On the world stage, real effective internationalism can only be based on the coming together of sovereign nations to decide on those issues which transcend the individual nation, on the basis of non-interference in the internal affairs of others and mutual respect. The UN could be such a forum – not the Security Council but the whole body with every country having an equal voice.

The young of Britain represent our best opportunity to break with the past. They desire neither narcosis nor slavery. They want a better world, and as they come to assume responsibilities, come to understand that this starts with a better Britain.

democracy

For those not in the first bloom of youth, this is not a call to leave the stage. Many young workers are yet to be convinced that people can change things in their own interests. There is a genuine debate to be had, and all sections of society can and must participate. The present disenchantment with active politics is potentially a positive phenomenon. Why should young trade unionists want to attend a branch meeting dominated by the passing of endless empty motions and false arguments between so-called left and right (which usually come to the same thing)? Why should people care which bourgeois party carries out the wishes of capitalism? Political parties are reinventing themselves to try to cater for the victim culture. We do not want to be victims.

Who is this Blair, and what does he represent? Does he restrain Bush or simply make him more palatable? Has universal suffrage distorted to become universal suffering? Representative democracy is completely devoid either of real representation or real democracy.

British workers have a proud history of struggle against the employer, but also a less admirable tradition of opting out by voting for someone else to act on our behalf. The truth is that nobody else can do it for you, whether it is a trade union leader, a politician or a political party, including this one, the communist party. Cries of betrayal or disillusion are simply cowardice. Workers must decide

and do for themselves what is needed; we have nobody to blame but ourselves for the situation we find ourselves in.

debate

In all the forums and arenas in which workers meet, the grumble "What has happened to our country?" should be turned around – "What do you want to happen to our country?" To all who would listen, workers should say "Is your industry or service good enough? If not, what are you going to do about it?"

Shake off laissez-faire thinking, fatalism, resignation. It is our class that is the only real superpower, and if we as a class don't show a bit more naked self-interest, capitalism will take us down with it. They envisage the end of Britain as a sovereign nation, becoming a region like any other, devoid of its own industry or agriculture. No modern nation on Earth can so exist. A second stone age in the 21st century. It's only unthinkable if we put our minds to the job at hand. The working class must rebuild Britain; the responsibility is ours. We say to our class, those of you who are not prepared to join the rebuilding must get out of the way of those who do. Start to ask questions and the answers will come.

No to the capitalist abandonment of this land and its people.

Yes to Britain.

Yes to science and industry.

Yes to a future, and it's in our hands.