

REBUILD BRITAIN!:

THEME OF THE
NINTH CONGRESS
OF THE
COMMUNIST PARTY OF BRITAIN
(MARXIST-LENINIST)
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FOREWORD

THE NINTH CONGRESS of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) was held in May 1991 some twenty three years after our first congress. We have produced our paper The Worker regularly for our class throughout these years.

For twelve years we said Thatcher must go; we were the first to make the demand. She was seen as an enemy of our class and of Britain. We rejoiced at her going. Our congress was able to review our class situation in Britain and the world in the light of her enforced departure. So that having achieved our objective of removing Thatcher, the immediate enemy, we had to consider what follows her removal.

The working class objective should now be that of Rebuilding Britain. This will involve rebuilding manufacturing industry, indispensable in an advanced country, and of necessity strengthening the trade unions. Attacks on industry and the unions have resulted in both industrial destruction and reduced membership, influence and power for the trade unions.

The history of British trade unions is of collective struggle for wages and better conditions against the employing class and capitalism. All the good things we still have in Britain -

like the health service, education, reduced working hours, holidays with pay - were only achieved through struggle and the workers' willingness to fight.

Workers will have to run their trade unions, and make policies and rules for their organisations, not just in theory but in practice. Joining a trade union is for many workers their first political act, when their recognition of necessity is given a means of expression.

So Thatcher is gone. However, capitalism in disarray scrambles for markets throughout the world, endangering peace and threatening war. Capitalism needs markets, but workers do not need capitalism. Many millions are without work, not only in Britain, but wherever capitalism has a hold. What more evidence is required of the failure of capitalism?

Socialism continues to be our aim in Britain. We have no blueprint and nobody to lean on; our class must face the future and take its decisions. We do have the experience, we have knowledge and skills, that when put together in practice can help us establish something better than capitalist society.

Les Elliott
Party Chairman

DESPITE the ideological onslaught on socialism, the congress expressed its Marxist conviction that the organised working class must reassert its class interest or face economic slump, impoverishment and war. And in that struggle for working class power, Leninism is essential.

Where have we come from as a working class? What do we want? And what do workers need? We must get our bearings so as to move ahead. Some have danced around the golden calf, but reality confronts even them with an industrial desert. By the late 1980s our history was being forgotten, an ominous sign, as lack of direction accompanied lack of vision, and as a future under capitalism threatened no future at all.

WORLD MALAISE

As the 20th Century draws to a close, the world appears in a wretched and dangerous state. The crux of the problem is that capitalism, an outmoded system which ought to have been superseded and replaced, remains in existence as the dominant world force. Capitalism rules over the very workers who should by now be leading and governing in their

own lands. Workers have a pressing duty to civilise the world. The amazing surge of revolutionary power and intellectual clarity wrought in 1917 by Lenin, the Bolshevik Party and the Russian working class heralded dramatic changes in the following decades as socialist construction and national liberation movements challenged capitalism and imperialism. The world since 1917 has seen residual feudalism and decaying capitalism attempt all in their power to reverse the modern age. For seventy years, despite the great setbacks and catastrophic conditions they faced, Soviet workers led the international working class.

Counter-revolution at home and abroad exploits working class division and uncertainty because all that potential must be fragmented and dissipated if feudalism, capitalism and imperialism are to survive. Yet the world is unsafe in the hands of exploiters. Workers can begin by putting their 'national house' in order, failure to do this also holds back others in the world. National progress helps international advance. For all the advances in this century, it has been crucial breakthroughs in the

historic birthplaces of industrial capitalism that have been lacking and which are urgently required.

In recent years a marked lessening of working class confidence, clarity of thought, and class organisation has been evidenced across the globe. Certain material factors may have been at work, but so also has ideological weakness contributed much to that decline. That sense of belonging to a class, of the necessity for class allegiance and solidarity, an understanding of historical development; too often such essential reflexes have been missing when occasion has called on them to be used. Workers need to restore their identity and reclaim their heritage.

BRITAIN AND ITS HISTORY

Britain is unique insofar as the industrial Revolution which started here in the 18th Century was the inception of a new system, modern capitalism, which was to grow wildly and impose itself on the world within a short span. In Britain you can see the most complete development of capitalism over 250 years. The system has certain inherent tendencies. And where capitalism in Britain goes, others

look set to follow. Britain's history matters; it has a significance that workers everywhere should appreciate and understand.

In its infancy and youth capitalism was dynamic: difficult to believe now. Only in its modern ruthlessness is it still true to its earliest instincts. No greater tribute to capitalism in its constructive period exists than the first chapter of the Manifesto of the Communist party, by Marx and Engels.

Ousting feudalism and remnants of slavery, capitalism transformed the world, unleashed tremendous new productive forces and mercilessly refashioned everything it could in its image, to its own economic, political and social advantage. Capitalism's arrival was bloody and violent, first disturbing and then displacing the old order. The world was turned upside down.

First and greatest in terms of capitalist transformation was Britain. Why? Because here its development was unrestricted, a peculiar combination of factors and advantageous circumstances, not least that feudalism had already been undermined and to a certain

extent displaced by capitalist practices in landownership and commerce. Landless labourers looking for work made Britain fertile ground for change; capitalism developed organically and pragmatically.

The transformation created two new classes: capitalists and workers. One class owning workshops and factories, and including investors and speculators; the other class of men, women and children labouring and brought together in industry. By mid- 19th century a rural, agricultural nation had turned urban and industrial. Many were sacrificed for the 'achievements of capitalism'. Royal Commissions and Committees of Inquiry heard evidence that revealed the price being paid by producers of the nation's wealth under the system pricing profit above all else. Marx would analyse this process with devastating logic in the historical chapters of his magnum opus 'Capital'.

Normal work was 12 hours daily - 15 hours at busy times - 6 days a week. Harsh discipline, with corporal punishment for child workers and heavy fines for adults, was common. Children were

employed from age 5 and adults refused work unless they brought their children for hire. Fifty years passed before successful effort to remedy the worst aspects of this exploitation. Starting in cotton mills, it took decades to reduce working time to a nominal 10 hour day. Employers resisted, saying costs would rise; that it was unacceptable interference with private property. The Factory Acts, said Marx, constituted the first great victory for the political economy of the working class over the political economy of the capitalist class.

Workers living at subsistence level could see all about them in Britain the national wealth derived from their labour. Workers withstood the worst of capitalism for years on end, whether the hanging of trade unionists, cavalry charges of large crowds, starvation or rampant landlordism. Our working class forebears organised unions and gradually repulsed unfettered capitalism, for otherwise they would have been exploited to the point of exhaustion, perhaps of extinction. Our history reveals how exploitative is capitalism, and we should not forget.

OUR HISTORY

From such class struggle, claimed Marx, would come Communist thinking as workers sought to end their exploitation, a proposition he put forward when the working class internationally hardly existed. But British workers did not follow the logic of Marx's proposition, they chose quite consciously another route, embarking on a strategy of defence but within capitalism. The fight for more wages, fewer working hours, better conditions, political rights, and provision of better education, housing and health services, though often led by Marxists eventually expressed itself in late 19th Century support for Liberals and early 20th Century establishment of a social democratic party, rather than in revolutionary form. Nevertheless, dignity of a sort was won.

Capitalism in Britain reached its zenith in the 1870s. Decline set in, relative to other competing capitalisms, and enthusiasm for industry was never as great again as it had been at the time of the Great Exhibition in 1851.

There was fear of the working class. Capital started to shun the home of industry. This did not

happen all at once, and in the last 120 years we have seen free trade, empire protection, state intervention, corporatism and Thatcherism: all have been tried by capitalism and have failed.

Capitalism in Britain has come full circle, reduced now to parody of its youthful vigour, harking back to its earliest prophets but with a desperate zeal rather than real conviction or belief. It is a spent force.

Britain's working class is similarly confronted by the implications of its organisation and ideology of living with capitalism rather than dispensing with it. We said 'perpetual defence means permanent subjection' at our second congress in 1971.

Our forebears alleviated their dreadful conditions by restricting the intrusions of Capital and asserting the needs of Labour. We should ask whether our generation can adopt a similar strategy in conditions so different today? For capitalism, no longer ascending or even in slow decay, is now hurtling pell-mell down the helter-skelter of absolute decline. Power resides with finance capital, often

international, while the needs of industry and people are cast aside. Usury rules, accountants dictate terms, and industry withers. Workers need to strip away the layers of illusion accumulated over decades and to see capitalism in its unglossed decrepitude.

SOCIALISM VERSUS CAPITALISM

The rapid course of events, still unfolding, in eastern Europe and the former USSR requires workers in Britain to understand this counter-revolution. The Russian Revolution of October 1917 eliminated the system whereby one person grows rich at the expense of another, all previous revolutions having merely replaced one form of exploitation by another. Workers do not need capitalists, that was what the decades of socialist construction made clear. But whereas capitalists realised the significance of '1917' in 1917, for too many workers that belated realisation has only come with Soviet collapse and its potentially devastating effect on them.

The world conflict between Capital and Labour was transformed by the October Revolution. Workers now

had a powerful ally in the fledgling Soviet state, capitalists having to fight on two fronts - against their own workers and against the pioneering USSR.

This world conflict has had various phases. Between the two world wars counter-revolution predominated. The era of Depression and Fascism may have culminated in the German attack on the USSR, but the USSR survived despite its 40 million wounded and 20 million dead. Moscow and Leningrad defied and destroyed the Nazi war machine.

Between the Battle of Stalingrad, turning point of the Second World War, and the victory of Vietnam over the imperialist giant of the USA, other countries carried out revolutions while liberation movements inspired by October freed colonial nations from imperialist control. Even in capitalist heartlands, such as Britain, advances were made in education, health care, housing and the like.

The war that capitalism assumed would crush the Soviet Union ended instead in a great victory for socialism, but at an appalling price. A consequence of that great

socialist advance was a political decision by the capitalist powers to set aside for a while the natural economic behaviour of capitalism so as to avoid - as they saw it - more of the world jumping into the communist orbit. Hence the Marshall Plan in Europe, with US strings attached, and the twenty or so years post-war when capitalist economies operated without any significant level of permanent unemployment. Compare this period of capitalist history with any before or since: it was quite unique. Workers took advantage of their new found strength to make gains. The greater recognition and satisfaction of people's needs in this period was unlike any other.

Many in the labour movement would strive to recreate this high-point of social-democratic achievement in Britain, believing as they do that it could be repeated under conditions of capitalism, not appreciating the peculiar circumstances that made it possible before. That period was an aberration, not conforming to the normal pattern or cycle of capitalist economic activity, and unlikely to be repeated because it owed its existence to the rapid - and in capitalist eyes, frightening - rise of Soviet influence in the world.

However, the forces of reaction regrouped in the mid-1970s and launched an offensive. Weakness in the USSR (revealed in the person of Kruschov), in China (shown after the deaths of Mao and Chou En Lai), and in our ranks generally, encouraged them. Failure by workers to ask themselves fundamental questions to which there are revolutionary answers, means workers again having to survive in a period of counter-revolution in many ways like the 1920s and 1930s.

The casualties of the present era have included Peoples' Democracies set up by the USSR as a defensive buffer along its southern and western frontiers after the Second World War. In none of these countries had the proletariat made a revolution, let alone established a dictatorship of the proletariat, or built socialism. All previously had made war on the USSR under fascist or royalist dictatorship or provided a base for making such war.

HEROIC FEATS

Under Gorbachev the USSR withdrew from its leading role in world affairs which it had occupied since 1917. The Soviet Union has

been broken up as its enemies always plotted. Counter-revolution there has led to crime, inflation, unemployment, poverty and war. No interlude this, but par for the capitalist course. The heroic feats of parents and grandparents bequeathed to the last Soviet generation, lacking first-hand knowledge of feudal lords or capitalists, a relatively easy existence. An immense shock awaits them. At least in Britain we assume crime, inflation, unemployment, poverty and war are the norm; that is our problem.

Had workers in those countries whose governments constantly opposed the Soviet revolution themselves made revolution, the USSR would have survived. Social democrats, including those in the Labour Party, connived with imperialist interests against the USSR. Starting with the 1918-20 War of Intervention, which saw the formation in 1919 of the Red Army to overcome 14 invading armies, social democracy has sided with and abetted reactionary campaigns.

Socialism as a system has not failed, despite the incessant propaganda barrage claiming that it has. Digressions from Marxism by

revisionists over many years led inevitably to the present state of affairs. Marxists have been vindicated. The polemic in the international communist movement was absolutely justified, and the revisionist line has been exposed as thoroughly bankrupt.

Self-inflicted wounds, attributable in a large measure to glaring weaknesses in revolutionary understanding and lack of control by a politically-conscious working class, rather than inherent flaws in socialism, resulted in the political catastrophes of recent years. Capitalism's problems, on the other hand, are intrinsic to its system, indeed part of its inherent character.

We should remember that Soviet economic growth rates between the 1920s and 1950s were very high, but then declined under Kruschov and stagnated under Brezhnev. The Gorbachev analysis of economic problems came up with the wrong answer - unleashing the market - rather than define the next stage for socialism. The fundamental economic problem seems to have been how to improve productivity of labour. There needs to be a continuous perfection of this:

necessarily fewer workers in particular processes, but generating more. Socialism has its own answers in keeping with its moral superiority: creation of new types of employment, allocation of new jobs, and retraining; all true to meeting human need in a modern society, protecting the right to work.

Capitalism is indifferent to human need. Industries are wrecked, whole communities destroyed, people thrown on the scrapheap when profit comes first.

The 20th Century, the modern age, commenced with Russia 1917. The first successful breaches in the wall of capitalism have occurred not in the oldest, most developed of capitalist states but wherever and whenever workers, led by communists from their own ranks, could make a breakthrough. Such successes have always been partial, and their permanence is not guaranteed, but they have provided invaluable experience to workers everywhere.

'Workers of All Lands, unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains, you have a world to win'. October and its successors give object lessons in how the chains

may be broken and offer glimpses of that world. There is much to imitate but also much to avoid. Our party has never depended on foreign assistance, moral or material, but we grew up in the shadow of great parties and have sometimes used them as a crutch. Now we need to go back to first principles, just as others are doing.

IMPERIALISM AND WAR

The USSR has been a mighty force for progress and stability, putting a brake on the aggressive designs of imperialism and injecting discipline into the ranks of workers and peasants everywhere. With the demise of this force since the mid-1980s we have seen the USA, like an ageing boxer who is over the hill but hoping for a comeback, so bravely take on the small fry - Grenada, Panama, Iraq - to blot from memory defeat by Vietnam.

But to beat Iraq the US had to gather armed forces from 30 countries. Some victory. To defeat the US, on the other hand, the Vietnamese took on US puppet forces, half a million US 'military advisers' and armies from 15 other states. Some defeat. Imperialism is a paper tiger when confronted by the people.

However, the world is being rearranged into blocs. Attempts to redivide the world are a prelude to war. Whether between Europe, Japan or the USA, trade war prefigures shooting war and workers of the world should prevent this or face the consequences. Workers of the world have to unite.

The movement of US forces from the Soviet front to a pivotal position in the Middle East, where three continents meet and where the world's main oil reserves are located, will have registered in Japan and the EC countries where they also regard Middle East oil as theirs by right. Failure by workers in the 30 aggressor countries to stop the waging of war on Iraq brings the next inter-imperialist war nearer. We can see it, and should stop it.

The now-familiar mercenary role played by Britain's government in the Gulf War will have been noted. Having been host for years to US weapons controlled by the Pentagon, we fight a foreign war beyond our means and go cap in hand around the world "to save Kuwait" while denying any interest in oil. Communists oppose war as a crime

against humanity. War is waged to oppose revolution; our duty is to achieve revolution to prevent war. Workers should not march in any crusade for capitalism. Rather than follow our rulers we should fight for our own emancipation.

The so-called 'new world order' is bogus; just as the 'peace dividend' means little more than sacking workers by the thousand, closing workshops by the score. The USA acts as the international arbiter of all regional conflicts, while Tokyo and Berlin expand influence through foreign clients. Imperialism has targets like Cuba, China and Vietnam in its sights. War is more likely than peace now that the Soviet Union has gone.

NATION

Imperialism sponsors the formation of competing blocs while simultaneously encouraging ethnic tensions and petty nationalisms among its rivals. The USSR, India, China and Europe have seen such tensions used for counter-revolutionary purposes. Whoever leads it - bourgeois, proletarian, royalist - determines how far any national movement is reactionary or progressive: contrast Estonia, Vietnam and Kuwait. Who stands to

gain? Whose class interests are pursued?

Questions of nation confront Britain. This country ought to break with its imperialist past, whether in Hong Kong or Ireland, but should also reject the mentality that would see us colonised and run from overseas. Rather than imperial or colonial mentality, national independence matters and should be prized.

This first nation-state was formed with rejection of papal rule from Rome at the time of Henry VIII; he closed monasteries and built a Royal Navy to defend this country, later enabling defeat of the Catholic Armada from Spain. This victory over Catholic Europe created the conditions for later economic, political and social advance. Today when we hear that "the nation-state is dead" we hear it from apologists for 'Europe' who would sell us out.

We want a world for workers to live in. The drift into Europe is the slide into war. The drift of Britain into Europe is both cause and effect of the destruction of our industry, the impoverishment of our people and the loss of national sovereignty.

The trade union movement says nothing openly about Europe because it embraces it. It does not speak against, because it wants the 'social chapter'. But it was not Brussels that got rid of Thatcher, it was the working class. Within the councils of the labour movement voices against Europe are merely murmurs. Muttering is not enough. The clear voice of an independent-minded and organised working class must make itself heard. Workers must give up the begging-bowl mentality. Our employers gave us nothing, and neither will those in Europe. What is needed is not so much a charter as renewed commitment to collective action.

ASSUMPTIONS

We need to examine matters more deeply as a working class and not be transfixed by the bland, jaded expressions so beloved of media pundits paid to limit the boundaries of our thought. The pundits are outspoken about trivia and dull conformists, with minor quibbles, to the capitalist cause.

Stock phrases are churned out religiously at every flashpoint between capitalism and socialism - 'democracy', 'the free world', 'market forces', 'freedom',

'parliamentary democracy', and 'human rights'. What do these amount to in reality? These expressions are euphemisms in the mouths of exploiters.

The right to vote is relatively recent in Britain and was most vigorously opposed at every turn by the propertied classes throughout the 19th and into the 20th Century. Finally women were only put on a par with men in 1928. As workers gradually won the vote they gained some leverage to improve lives under the present system. But did these improvements emanate from parliament? Were they not a reflection of the state of organisation and influence of ideas among the working class? Did they not depend on the balance of power between capitalists and workers? Remember that things won were often taken away. Look at trade union rights. But apart from voting, where are the much vaunted freedoms of the working class? What we have we have achieved by our own efforts: extracted rather than donated.

Direct experience aids awareness and understanding of politics. Thatcher, however, was in power for so long that there are among us

those who can recall little else. The present outlook of those under 30, on whom the future of Britain rests, has been conditioned by this experience. Undoubtedly this has narrowed understanding, imagination and debate, for in those grey years there seemed little scope for vigorous thought. Yet despite those limitations, our task is to lead, however unattractive our message may sound to the fatalistic and cynical. Our task is to assert Marxism, not defend it.

'THATCHER OUT' LINE SUCCEEDS

In Britain there is a new situation. Thatcher is now Out. She came bringing war and depression and left, as a parting gift, war and a slump. She destroyed the livelihoods of millions, set in train the destruction of health and education, sapped the institutions of bourgeois democracy through which some redress could be had, and was re-elected twice with comfortable majorities. By the end she was rejected generally and her party forced to dump her. Society said it was Thatcher who did not exist. Thatcher promised a renaissance, a revival of capitalism through a

return to the policies of Nassau Senior and the Manchester School. The consequence of her policies, however, is that British capitalism is essentially defunct, half now foreign-owned and what is not defunct has decamped.

Throughout the 1980s we promulgated the line 'Thatcher Out -Vote Labour', the latter as the way of achieving the former. The line succeeded. The real threat of a Labour victory forced the 'palace coup' that toppled her. We saw in Thatcher open counter-revolutionary intent, even if she could manage it, utter destruction of the working class. Everything had to be directed against that threat. Without her removal nothing else was possible in our country.

Major, her replacement, is no Thatcher. His government is weaker, less strong ideologically. The ruling class has temporarily changed gear, fearing it could not sustain open counter-revolution with such venom. Workers should take advantage of new opportunities presented by weaker capitalist control.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

The line 'Thatcher Out - Vote

Labour' never meant 'endorse whatever the Labour Party says'. Labour and Tory parties are two faces of capitalism, though not the same face. The Conservative Party is of, by, and for employers. The Labour Party is of and by workers but is, in its parliamentary expression whenever a key issue arises, for the preservation of capitalism.

The Labour party cannot preserve capitalism so far gone in absolute decline. But by returning to its roots in the working class, who finance it, it can and must revoke anti-union laws imposed by Thatcher, and protect the right to strike and to act in solidarity with fellow workers. Labour will live or die on the trade unions. If it opts to abandon the organised working class, workers will disown it. No working class owes automatic allegiance to any particular party. Allegiance is earned.

CHANGING WORKING CLASS IDEOLOGY

The working class is the only revolutionary force. Counter-revolution has been targeted on that latent potential we have to transform British society, to

redesign and rebuild. In this parlous situation we the workers must discern what is and what must be. Capitalists may take their money - our money - and run, but we are here and have nowhere else to go. This is our country, the only one we have. We must feed and house our people and raise our children. We alone can formulate a programme for our survival. We are our own best resource. There may be unwillingness to embrace progress in Britain, but as a working class we have nowhere to hide. Basic class activity and organisation are required to overcome silly ideas that have grown like weeds.

Silly ideas have included: the idea that you can get something for nothing; get-rich quick schemes; somebody else will do what has to be done; things are not so bad really; style over substance will pass muster; something will turn up to save us; that reality is what you imagine it to be; that there is nothing we can do to change anything.

We should reflect on the origins and history of social democracy. In the year 1850 the Communist Manifesto had just appeared and had shown at the level of theory

that the working class could effect its own emancipation from wage slavery. At the same time, engineers and other skilled workers were showing for the first time anywhere in the world that workers organised could be a match for any employer. The conclusion should have been obvious: use the practical strength to achieve the theoretical goals.

Yet within a few decades, the German Marxist party - the largest in the world - was bargaining away its principles in merger negotiations with another party at Gotha. It was being proclaimed in Britain that the future lay solely with 'new unionism', organisation of the unskilled. It was being claimed that the skilled workers were corrupt 'labour aristocrats'.

The Communist manifesto had presented workers as active, self-reliant, able to think, speak and act for themselves, and thus capable of changing the world. It was based on faith in the working class.

Social democracy, including the newly-founded Labour Party, saw workers as passive, an electorate, a force to be harnessed, 'noble savages', uncorrupt because unlettered, whose lot on earth

would be improved by politicians making reforms on their behalf. It was then, and is now, based on fear and hatred of the working class.

The skill, the sheer professionalism, the creative potential in workers is what social democracy most hates and fears, but that is what must now be tapped if we are to draw up a programme for survival. Just as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers started the movement for workers' emancipation, so now the most skilled sections must finish the job off.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

So where do we begin? We begin with the material basis of our life in Britain today: the ability of our people to create the means of life for us all, the sum of material and cultural needs to be met. That the wherewithal for this -material, intellectual, human - is in decline here has become as taken - for - granted as industry itself used to be. In its publications and public meetings, and in workplaces, this party has warned consistently since the mid-1970s of the enveloping industrial destruction and its consequences for Britain:

"We are a manufacturing nation;

the working up of raw materials into finished goods, has long been the basis of our cultural identity and material welfare ... The unchecked and wanton destruction of manufacturing is the destruction of our class, for we are industry." CPB(M-L) Fourth Congress, 1976

The British people have known and understood what has been happening to our country. Many have ignored it, while many others - not thinking and acting collectively - have felt powerless to influence it. Where workers have fought against it, and despite initial isolation, they have had a response.

So once again we set out some facts about the present state of our workshop, Britain, however unpalatable that may be. Once again we lay bare the emaciated anatomy of industry, not as a dry treatise but as a vivid canvas depicting the challenge before us. We must be in no doubt about what we face as working people and as a nation.

ANATOMY OF DECLINE

Energy - coal industry sabotaged; electricity stations closed down; nuclear capacity, research and development to be cut; squandering of scarce resources of oil and gas.

Agriculture - poverty for the workers; ruination facing small farmers; agribusiness in command; foreign control.

Construction - a few prestige projects in an industry in crisis; low pay and dangerous conditions; massive unemployment; housing needs ignored.

Transport - destruction of the merchant fleet; railways in decay; traffic at a crawl; public transport nearing collapse.

Utilities - in private hands; sewerage system needing reconstruction and repair; water supplies unsafe; telecommunications a licence to make money; neglect of planning for electricity, water and gas.

Manufacturing - less and less made here; fewer apprenticeships; neglect of training; loss of skill; unemployment and closures; balance of trade crisis.

Counter-revolution here and abroad has assumed the specific feature of an attack on productive capacity, while ideological weakness among workers about economic questions has assisted this process. Falling investment in industry has

meant we have had a deficit of imports over exports of manufactured goods since 1983. We import what could be produced here, all the while losing jobs, skills and independence.

INDUSTRIAL SABOTAGE

Britain cannot survive without manufacturing industry. Without production we have little to sell, while forced to import from overseas, the result being massive trade deficit year after year. This is economic suicide. It has also been government policy for years.

Manufacturing is about the production of wealth. Industry is the dynamo, the stock exchange merely a bulb in the economic circuit, a bulb that soon grows dim as manufacturing falters without proper care and maintenance. Wealth from speculation is false economics, as the property market that ties up billions of pounds shows, as the decline of the City following destruction of industrial wealth production makes crystal clear. Without real wealth, essential services like health and education suffer. It is as basic as that - do not produce and we neither eat, stay healthy or get educated. Essential services are underfunded. Industry

and essential services need each other; both have been under attack for years. Industry is essential for services that make civilised existence possible. Compelling evidence accumulates that, left to itself, capitalism would destroy the very basis of civilisation.

Industry is at the very root of our culture as a people. Thatcher understood what Heath did not: laws alone do not destroy trade unions, but destroy industry and unions will lose power. Unless the retention of staple industry is addressed as a serious problem by our class then a national crisis of amazing proportions will confront Britain. Like the exodus from Ireland in the 1840s after the Great Famine -when Anglo-Irish landlords exported food while millions starved - there lies in prospect a British diaspora unless industrial decline is stopped.

For capitalism, production and industry are incidental, merely processes in which surplus value is generated. But for our working class, production and industry are vital. We should think the unthinkable in order to survive.

MANUFACTURING- A FORCE FOR CHANGE

The process of manufacturing involves labour of various skills in complex interrelation.

Manufacturing is where production is organised and where we organise as a class. Manufacturing is also a force for change; it brings advance in the mode of production and impels social change. Therefore allowing manufacturing to decline is to accept that the gains made by our class can regress. So how can we stop the regression?

Under capitalism we cannot halt the decay. Capitalism is set on a course of quick returns, short term speculation and consequent destruction of industry. But we can slow the rate of decline, and we can raise the question of the primacy of workers and production. This is part of the challenge to the present disastrous course, and opportunity to stress the need for, and viability of, socialism. At present we are nowhere near the level required to remove capitalism, but we can start to defend what industry we have got. The situation post-Thatcher - our enemy having lost the initiative - is the signal to start asserting our needs, to start Rebuilding Britain.

Should we pass up this opportunity to tackle the problems for ourselves, then we can expect worse. Capitalism in extremis needed a Thatcher and will in time throw up another avowed counter-revolutionary, but worse. It is time now for a fundamental change. Rebuilding develops our potential.

We have to Rebuild Britain. It will not be easy and cannot be done by expecting a capitalist revival or foreign investment in Britain. Step one is to cease dwelling on the disasters of the past, focusing instead on what we can do for ourselves, however small. From small gains come larger ones. A start must be made if we are to make that greater impact. It requires a belief in doing things for ourselves, by ourselves, as a class. When capitalism can treat Britain to a 'scorched earth' policy, then a belief in our class having to tackle the job becomes necessity, the only solution we have. There is no capitalist solution.

It is incumbent on workers to put the state of manufacturing industry top of the agenda. Rebuild manufacturing and we really do Rebuild Britain. When a hospital is threatened with closure there is often anger, and support for staff

and patients most directly involved. When a factory or workshop faces closure it is more often met with a shrug of the shoulders. Why is this? We should think through what we mean by 'the nation's health'. What do we mean?

THE GREAT ESCAPE

We have lived and fought too long within the ideological boundaries of Capital. Our ideas for the future go far beyond their blinkered vision. Our plans for the future far outstrip the capacity of Capital. Their values are moribund and hold us back. To think and act for ourselves is our only course. Convincing workers that capitalism is exploitative, squandering resources both human and material, is easy. But we lack confidence in ourselves; it is that which socialist commitment overcomes.

We are at that point in the life of an old society where we hate what we see all around us but hesitate out of timidity to break out for pastures new. We hear that capitalism has reformed, that past centuries of exploitation were merely a transition period before the not-so-bad present. What an absurd claim to make after a generation of Thatcherism that has

scarred those it has touched. This wishful thinking avoids analysis of the chaos all around us. Our appeal is to the dynamic element in society with critical faculties still intact that knows there is something better.

We should not be perplexed by new forms of social democracy. These new forms of class conciliation that are emerging - 'new deal', 'new agenda', 'social dialogue', 'social charter', 'social partnership' - are current terms for that traditional objective of seeking to adjust Labour to Capital, fixing our hopes to their interests; the triumph of hope over experience.

To ask more of capitalists is a necessary part of workers' survival. The demands now for improvements in pay and for new legal guarantees on pay, hours, training or maternity leave, health and safety, pensions and trade union recognition, all represent the aspirations of working people.

After the Thatcher years, lessons of struggle for improvement will have to be learned afresh by a new generation. Organisation at workplaces has weakened, yet the fight for a better life begins with the fight for a better working life. We communists are part of that, but we are for something

altogether more ambitious. It is our job to promote a dialogue among workers not for social partnership with the employing class but for the social supremacy of the working class. To that end we long ago dispensed with the fiction of the 'middle class', that cowards' castle for the complacent.

Workers want more and better. A working class that does not seriously seek social reform will not otherwise come to realise the necessity of the working class itself reforming society in its own image.

The working class is not dead. Trade unions are not dead. Socialism is not dead. We are all as large as life: having survived, we now mean to flourish. But know, and face, the truth about Britain today; the reality not the fantasy of the colour supplement or the retail park. Rebuild Britain because the old one is gone for good. Speak out - say what is needed. Fight for more and for better. Stand up, take heart, take part, take charge, take over.

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