

Good evening, comrade chairman, comrades, friends. “You had one job: is an expression popular on the Internet, used of people who had one task, usually something straight forward, at which they fail dismally. I can think of no group of people of whom it could better be used than the MPs and peers in Westminster. The government will implement what you decide, it said on the leaflet sent out, at considerable expense to us taxpayers. Who would have thought that, three years on, we would be holding our May Day meetings under the slogan Out of the EU in London, Leeds and Glasgow, that we would find ourselves still in EU membership, the leaving date of 29th March set when they were finally forced to invoke Article 50 brazenly ignored, preparing for elections to the European Parliament?

Many of us have local elections tomorrow. Where I live, and doubtless it's the same with you, the establishment political parties are desperate to say that these are local elections, and should be about local issues, not, please not, about their betrayal of democracy. This rings hollow, firstly because local authorities have been systematically stripped of their ability to deliver services by successive governments over decades...and there remains not much on which to judge the candidates and parties other than their attitude to dog excrement, a perennial talking point. But it also speaks to a desperation to avoid the reckoning that they know is coming. It may be, too, that we have elections for MEPs on 23rd May. These elections have traditionally been ignored by the majority of us. In 1999 only 24% turned out to vote, the highest number was 38%. The candidates are careerist place-men, and few of us could name any but a handful of British MEPs, and why should we? But if we are going to be compelled to hold these elections, at a cost of £109 million, then we should seize that opportunity to tell the EU and their domestic agents that yes, when we voted to leave, we did actually mean it. Our party rarely issues calls for people to vote one way or another: for one thing, one of our guiding principles is that workers can think for themselves, and it is arrogant for any political organisation to say we have done the thinking for you, and this is what you should do – not that that stops them - but in this situation, there is an inescapable conclusion: if there's an election for the European Parliament on 23rd May, then we should all do everything we can to ensure a massive vote for the Brexit Party, a thumping repudiation, once again, of the treaties, of Rome, Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, Lisbon.

May Day was established in the late nineteenth century as International Workers Day. It comes at a time of renewal: spring is springing, the trees are in leaf, the sap is rising.

Today in 2019, our May Day focus is on Britain. This has been our Party's unique approach, since our foundation more than fifty years ago. We eschewed the approach that many who called themselves communists, who were fan-clubs for struggles far away, the farther away the better. We understood, as did the Vietnamese, who achieved unification and their final and complete independence the day before today, 30th April, that you must fight the enemy where you are. And here in Britain, we, the oldest working class in the world, faced the oldest capitalist class in the world.

What do we mean by the working class? There's been much nonsense talked about class over the years. For us it is simple: if you go to work, or if you worked and are now retired, living on a pension, deferred wages, or if you are preparing for a lifetime of work as a student or apprentice, you're a worker. It has nothing to do with habits, customs, where you went to school, what you call the meals you eat in the middle of the day or the evening, whether you say lavatory or toilet, or the categories advertisers like to divide us up into to sell us tat. Here in Britain, it means the vast majority of the population; indeed, it means the nation, since the capitalist class long since abandoned Britain. Compare continental Europe where even today, many countries still have a class of small peasant proprietors, still an economic and political force. In Britain enclosure put an end to the peasantry, and the changes in the countryside created the conditions for an industrial working class, the class that made the industrial revolution and released the storm of ingenuity and invention that marked the end of the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century.

I think it's important to remind ourselves of that history because the history of the development of the working-class is closely connected to the development of democracy, and it is democracy that is now at stake. We might not associate the Tudor period with democracy, as we now understand it, but it was a time when we first asserted national sovereignty in the break with Rome. The legislative programme devised by Thomas Cromwell for Henry VIII was cleverly and clearly constructed, and stated our sovereignty, The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm, the statutes and Cranmer's 39 articles stated. The dissolution of the monasteries, as well as

striking a blow against Papal power and influence, also prepared the way for agricultural innovation. The bible could be printed and read in English, and if the bible could be, what else can you print and distribute?

One hundred years later, and the backbone of the parliamentary armies were the artisan and apprentices from London and other centres of manufacture. From these groups came the Levellers, who argued for universal manhood suffrage. Cromwell too has lessons for us today; when he faced a corrupt and prevaricating parliament, 'you have sat too long for any good you have been doing lately – depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!'

Let me interrupt my chronology here, by going back to the sixth century BC, to the Athenian democracy: any free adult male over 20 could attend the *ἐκκλησία*, an assembly which decided the big questions: war and peace, legislation, some trials, and some elections. Other official posts were filled by lot, a system designed to minimise corruption and careerism, which has much to recommend it. My point, in going back to Athens, is to remember that the democracy lasted only a few decades, and was subverted from within by Athenians, disaffected aristocrats whose hatred of democracy led them to conspire with Athens's enemies, chiefly Sparta.

These historical lessons have some relevance to where we now find ourselves. The referendum is something like the revolution of the 17th century. We cut a king's head off, long before the French ever got round to it. And for all that the Stuart monarchy was restored in 1661, they couldn't reattach Charles I's head. Equally, no one can undo that historic exercise in democracy. If you recall the prophecies, after the vote we would be reduced to scavenging in the gutters and waste bins for dead dogs to eat. Remember Donal Tusk before the vote: "I fear Brexit could be the beginning of the destruction of not only the EU but also of Western political civilisation in its entirety" Establishment rage against democracy became almost self-parodic: remember the calls for a return to property qualifications for voting, for educational test for voters, for the electorate to be screened for incorrect attitudes before being allowed to vote.

Remember too the deliberate portrayal of the majority vote as an act of atavistic rage, by people who lacked the sophisticated understanding of their betters. We didn't vote leave, by this argument, because we wanted to leave the EU, but because we felt left

behind, left out. I won't give her the satisfaction of naming her, but a certain Green MP made a video aimed at leave voters in which she said, in the tones of one talking to a stupid and viscous child, that she understood our anger.

I shan't spend much time on the role of trade unions: at May Days past we might have spent more time on it, but with the honourable exceptions of the majority of the rail unions, who have a better understanding of the issues involved since their members work in an industry that has suffered most at EU instigated privatisation, most have, with no better mandate than the views of head office staff and a few activists, rushed to join hands with those employers who want to overturn the vote. Hence the shameful collaboration of the TUC general secretary and the CBI, who put out a joint statement attacking a no deal Brexit and calling for an extension. This has nothing to do with the mass: trade unions have become a fast-emptying house, as our founding chairman once said, national executives dominated by corrupt cliques pursuing self- or sectional interest. I received the ballot papers for my unions NEC the other week. I have to vote for someone for a female seat, someone for a male seat, someone for a low-paid women's seat, someone for a black member's female seat, someone for a black member's male seat, someone for a female disabled members' seat. Whatever happened to unity? When my branch elects someone to represent us at our union's national conference we are required to only consider women. Why? If we want to send a transgender chimpanzee to our conference, we will....we decide. The reconstruction of our trade union movement will take a long time.

We do not need to repeat today the arguments we had to make throughout Britain's membership of the EEC, then EU. The vote to leave was driven by clarity, clear recognition that the EU was a destructive force for British industry and agriculture, and acted as a fetter on our ability to develop as a nation. I'll only touch on some of the potential here, but consider our universities: vice-chancellors and other senior managers in British universities, suborned by massive salaries paid from the ever-expanding overseas students fees, were encouraged to see their institutions not as places of learning and research for the good of the people, but as plcs, capitalist institutions there to make a profit. But universities should serve the people: we need an expansion of medical and nursing education, of engineers and scientists, computer scientists, researchers who can develop the new technologies we need. Universities, and

schools, will play a crucial role in reconstructing Britain, but in the case of the former, there needs to be a cleansing of the Augean stables. The Augean stables were the home of immortal, so divinely healthy, cattle, who had produced enormous quantities of dung, over a period of thirty years. The task, with universities, will be yet more daunting.

In the latest issue of *Workers* there is an article on our fishing industry. Read it. As well as the destruction the EU has visited on that industry, to date, it shows how our failure to leave has disastrous consequences for those who have managed to survive so far.

Take too transport: transport, by road, rail, sea and air, is vital to move raw materials manufactured goods from place to place so that we can work on them, transform them, use them, and to allow us to get to and from our workplaces, and travel further for work and leisure. So why should we not decide what we need, what track, signalling equipment, engines, rolling stock, and so on, and plan to make it here? Free of the EU we could reopen the lines closed by Beeching and since. Fishing ports need road and rail links to get fish to market, yet did you know that Fleetwood, one of the major fishing ports in the north west, has had no railway station since 1970.

Take banks: British banks, if you can even speak of such a thing, since there are none, but let us say those we might historically consider British banks, lend internationally. They lend hardly anything to British businesses. We need a finance system that serves the needs of the people, not the other way round.

I could offer many more examples from every type of economic activity. What is clear is that Britain could release an enormous amount of creativity and ingenuity, as much as in the nineteenth century, when we finally free ourselves of the EU fetters. The resources of this island, material, human, intellectual, are considerable. We have a Parliament that been weighed in the balances and found wanting.

For the final part of my contribution this evening, I want to say something about this party and democracy. We were founded by industrial workers, engineers, who drew on the best democratic traditions of the British trade union movement. We're not a party of the left, or right, or anywhere else. In 1789, if you sat in the new French national assembly, if you were a royalist you sat on the right, if you supported the revolution, on

the left. This had some meaning then, and there, but has never meant much in Britain, just as you won't find us wearing yellow vests. Right or left, all existing political parties are for the continuation of capitalist rule.

We have forged our own style in fifty-one years. It is characterised by honesty, first and foremost. We have no gurus or intellectuals, who tell the party what and how to think. Everyone contributes, everyone works to apply the line. We study. And, and you may think this a little thing, but it's says something about our approach to democracy, our meetings start and finish on time.

We have no Soroses, no billionaires to back us, our money comes from our members and from the class. No full-timers: no one can make a career of party membership. We don't tell British workers what to do, still less do we issue advice to those in other countries on how to conduct their struggles; but we know Britain, and we will take no lessons from those overseas on how we should proceed.

Up to, and since the referendum, we have seen new ways of organising: leavers of groups, the Brighton Brexiteers, marches, rallies, leafletting...all over the country different groups formed to win the vote, and thereafter saw the need to organise to force its implementation. We have worked with many people in recent years, people who we would probably have never met in trade-union branch meetings. We see in them natural communists, people who share our strategic aim, who understand the need to unite the greatest number behind that, who have enormous creativity and a rich store of ideas, who have the discipline born of conviction to work to achieve our aim.

It is encouraging to see democratic opposition to the EU grow in its remaining member states. Brexit has precipitated a crisis in the EU, one its developing economic slump will intensify. But we cannot rely on others to do the fighting for us: perhaps we made that mistake when we watched Greece capitulate to the bankers. Politics, for the British people cannot now be a spectator sport. The choice is between the world created in capitalism's image, the EU and a break with that for a new world of sovereignty and independence. The party has no interests separate from those of the class. With sovereignty an independence we have a world to win. We say, as Workers does this issue: Just Leave. Out of the EU! For an independent Britain!