



BRITISH INDEPENDENCE AND THE WORKING CLASS

Political statement from the Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist, 18th Congress, London, November 2018.



MODERN, TRANSNATIONAL, monopoly capital is united in seeking a world where free trade rules unhindered – or more exactly, where monopoly capital rules unhindered.

We know what that world would be like, because we have been living in a huge free trade area for several decades. It's called the European Union. Its four freedoms of movement – goods, capital, services and labour (not people, never people, just people as workers) – are the freedoms that capital wants for the whole world.

Hence the enthusiasm from the US and the EU for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Free trade requires the end of nation states. It is the opposite of nations trading freely, because it destroys their ability to plan their economies. It is freedom for monopolies, not for peoples.

A whole planet built in the image of the EU, of transnational capital: that's the true meaning of globalisation. That would mean the end of sovereign states, and our acknowledgement of their importance is key to understanding what the tasks of our working class – and hence of our Party – are.

A new, epic struggle is defining our times, shaping the fight between the two contending classes. It is a new form of national liberation, centred on sovereignty and control over our material and intellectual resources, and it is worldwide. Waging that war, winning that war, will become a condition of survival for workers in every country.

Either we live in an independent Britain deciding our own future, or we become slaves to international capital. This fight for national independence will not cease when we leave the EU – an indispensable first step. It will never cease while capital exists. Indeed, it will become even more acute.

Every step forward will increase the resistance of monopoly capitalism. We see this in Britain, where the victory in the referendum also produced an intensification of pro-EU feeling in a minority. Advance brings forth reaction, in the same way as revolution produces counter-revolution.

So the period between 20 February 2016, when the referendum was announced, and leaving is not an exception. We won't get back to business as usual, because in some ways the rules of political economy have changed. Not fundamentally – labour power is still a commodity, and the working class is still the creator of value, not the capitalists. But now transnational capitalism's attempt to take the very existence of sovereign states out of the equation changes the picture. The kind of struggle we have been engaged in, the broad alliance for our nation, is but a foretaste of what is to come. Things will get tougher and rougher.

Free movement

The policy of free movement of labour is utterly destabilising and wasteful of the huge potential of our people. It is shameful that the trade unions have mostly failed to link deskilling with the EU. We must prevent employers from importing labour at will from outside. Instead we must demand the training and skilling of our own population. Our knowledge and skills must be developed and invested in production for our needs, and pride in our expertise passed on to the next generations.

One thing is clear: our seizing of the issue of the free

movement of labour has singled this Party out from what is called the Left. Outside of us, no one is dealing with this properly, however correct they may be on individual issues. But outside of established political circles, the working class is definitely talking about it.

We get attacked for talking about it. But we need to discuss it more, because it is central to our message, central to the working class and central to the plans capitalism has for us. And we have to understand that it's not just or even mainly about unskilled labour.

We are in the middle of an unprecedented economic revolution where the motive power – the most important force of production – is not water or steam or coal or iron ore, but knowledge. In the modern world, the most valuable commodity of all is intellect, people. And one of the most important conditions for trade in goods and services is the import and export of workers.

In the eighteenth century a triangular trade developed: goods manufactured in Britain were shipped to West Africa, where they were exchanged for slaves, who were then sold in the West Indies and the proceeds used to buy sugar, molasses and rum. Now there is a new triangular trade, based on wage slavery. Less developed countries allow their talent to emigrate to the developed ones; the products which result from this talent are manufactured in Asia; then sold throughout the world.

For instance, in Britain, fewer than half the doctorates awarded now go to UK nationals. If you exclude student teachers, very nearly two-thirds of graduate students are foreign nationals. This has consequences. The first and most urgent is that the academic sector as a whole is now utterly dependent on the "free movement" of the world's talent – not to speak of dependence on EU grants – no matter what the damage to other nations' intellectual base. No surprise, then, at the horror from university managements at Brexit.

With health professionals being imported, why bother to train young British people or spend money on bursaries?

Brains matter. The planes carrying the skilled, the "brightest and the best", to Britain, to Europe, to the US are the modern equivalent of the Spanish galleons carrying gold and silver from the New World. All that gold and silver rotted Spain from within. With no need to invest in developing its own resources, its wealth turned it into an economic backwater. This is already happening in Britain.

Not to speak of the effect on the developing world, on central and eastern Europe, on anywhere outside Britain, the US, Canada, France, Germany and a couple of other countries. Developing countries are systematically drained of their intellectual talent. And like the eagle returning every day to eat Prometheus's liver, monopoly capitalism comes back each year for more.

To call for open borders is to betray the British working class and the working classes of all nations.

Control

Fighting against capitalism's "freedoms" is a new kind of national liberation, though that should not be misunderstood. We are not Vietnam or Angola, needing to expel armed occupiers. For us, everything centres around control, around who controls. Sovereignty itself needs to be exercised, but where does sovereignty reside? Not in Parliament. Not in the courts. Not in divine right. Real

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sovereignty can only derive from the people.

Take control, we say. Workers must demand control for themselves. It's a message that can be found in every single industrial dispute. So we need to argue from the workplace out, and from the country in: the working class must rule.

After so long on the back foot the working class is starting to set goals that cannot be put back into the bottle and corked. Workers have experienced how "free" markets work. They want control. But to seize it, our class needs organisation. If workers reject the trade unions, other forms of organisation must be created to suit the situation.

The recognition is growing that to be an independent Britain, we must have an independent national economy where we develop self-sufficiency, producing as much as possible here in Britain for our domestic consumption. What we are then unable to produce in Britain, we import in exchange for British exports that have been earmarked as part of a reciprocal set of trade agreements struck with other countries but without any political strings attached either way.

This runs counter to the political rationale of the EU and in other trade blocs, where 'free' trade is used to gain new export markets by battering particular countries into giving up on their own industries. The end result is that large swathes of the importing country's population become underutilised and impoverished – with the active connivance of that country's government.

When a government allows, for example, the cheap import of steel, its aim is to destroy the home production of steel; it has nothing to do with supply and demand. So the dumping of imports – whether of goods, services or labour – should have no place in Britain's future trade arrangements.

To achieve self sufficiency will require a long and determined fight. Capitalism is an utterly sick system, with vast amounts of capital lying unused. We have to protect ourselves from this sickness.

Leave and industry

The economic, financial and social problems we have can only be resolved within our borders. To make out they can be solved globally is at best an attempt to deliberately avoid a solution; at worst to try to continue with the same type of restraint that the EU has applied to Britain but moved up a notch to a global level. It will not be easy, but our prize is great.

As part of Brexit every sector of commerce and industry needs to go through the consequences of Britain no longer being a member of the EU. This means setting up independent structures and getting the necessary authorisations and paperwork in place not only to help large firms but also those small companies found in Britain's towns and often villages involved in exports. Our independence must define our regulation, not the other way round.

Of course the problems faced by Britain are not simple but complex and serious. In particular the role of international corporations has blurred what is meant by British industry. But are the problems associated with international corporations entirely new? Not really. Think of Ford Motor Company and others who set up shop here during the 1930s.

As part of this process international corporations operating in Britain should be required to reveal their technology and working practices together with sharing their entire production know how, including set up, machinery and access to their expert personnel. This expertise resides in their workforce.

Brexit demands that we think harder about efficient methods of British production, including the development of local supply chains for each sector to replace the current fragmented EU cross-border supply chains (another EU device whose effect has been to weaken the bargaining position of British trade unions).

Local integrated procurement throughout England, Scotland and Wales is essential to becoming independent, and to restoring trade union national collective bargaining. Meanwhile the failed globalist outlook uses separatism to advocate petty regional "planning" under the thumb of multinationals so that workers are broken up into harmless regional tribes squabbling with each other. This drive is particularly evident in Scotland.

Co-ordinated democratic working class decision making across all sectors of British industry and commerce is therefore profoundly important.

Petty separatism and its regionalist counterpart seek one way or the other to break up Britain. Neither has a place in the British working class democratic approach, yet this remains a weakness in the mind of our class. Trade unions call for increasing federalism within Britain, and the false call for Scotland to cut loose while maintaining the shackles of the EU continues. We cannot allow this – British unity is essential for our sovereign future.

There should be no confusion over Northern Ireland: the EU has turned the Irish border into a weapon, aiming to bring Northern Ireland entirely into its orbit. This has nothing to do with Irish independence, which can only begin to happen by the Republic itself leaving the EU.

Value

Those who peddle capitalist ideas are great hands at avoiding what is unpleasant. To them the fact that workers create value only for it to be grabbed by capitalists as surplus value is most certainly unpleasant since it reveals the underlying reality of capitalism, namely class exploitation and the class power of the capitalist.

Ever since Marx explained the labour theory of value in the 19th century, social democrats have been busy ignoring it with their blather about "fair" wages. Now the diversion of productivity is adding to the confusion.

Over the years the fiction that supply and demand governs the price of a product has encouraged superficial thinking. The capitalists know what really determines value, namely the minimum labour time spent in producing a product. But the idea of value has been jumbled up in daily economic parlance and blurred, reconfigured as the concept of productivity (output per person per hour).

Productivity has then been used to stoke up blind global competition, leading to the replacement of British products by cheaper imports from international corporations. By the same token productivity has also been used as a reason for British companies to deploy their capital overseas and to produce from those locations while closing their British-based factories.

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Credit

Globalisation suffered a financial collapse in 2007 and with it went the belief that “secure” money management is best left to investment bankers and their political patrons. Since then the position, particularly in the case of the euro, has been temporarily stabilised – but this is no more than temporary.

The problem centres on trade imbalances, where deficit countries that have been shorn of industry first have to be provided with credit from the overdeveloped exporting countries to enable those deficit countries to continue to import (buying on tick).

A slight variation in technique is where countries such as Britain or Greece continually sell their fixed capital assets such as utilities or infrastructure to overseas buyers. This has become necessary in order to obtain foreign currency that can be used to pay for imported goods that are no longer being produced domestically. The EU has created countries of debtors.

This sale of our assets has come about as a direct result of Britain being deliberately de-industrialised as part of a concerted political attack on the organised working class – using ‘Free Market’ ideology as a weapon. Yet clearly Britain cannot be sold off piecemeal indefinitely, not least because we will run out of sizeable fixed assets to sell.

Value, money and investment

The theory of money circulation and pricing in the planned economy has hardly been discussed or developed at all, at least not here in Britain. Why not? Our history shows that if you don’t own the keys to all the banks but try to nationalise certain other industries and talk of an investment bank in a “mixed economy” you will fail.

Currently the conversion of a product’s value into its price and its subsequent sale for profit is facilitated using commercial banks to clear the transaction. So part of the money function administered by banks is about converting surplus value into a monetary expression (i.e. the value of things converted into the price of things). From this it follows that we need a banking system where surplus value is converted into a monetary value and then claimed by society as a whole rather than being hoarded as capital by individuals who have played no part in creating value.

Under this approach money becomes a unit of account to identify surplus value available for investment each year as well as being used to pay wages and to distribute and exchange goods and services. But money is no longer used as a store of value set aside by the capitalist.

At present the control and hoarding of the money supply in private hands is like controlling the circulation of services vital to life.

Although it’s not immediately obvious, much depends on British workers recognising the full value that we as a working class produce when at work (Marx’s labour theory of value) and the fact that a large part of that value goes to the capitalist combines, instead of benefiting British society. This is for the future. But the ideas need to circulate now.

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Priorities

What are the priorities in the coming period? To answer this question, we need to do more than look at our strengths and our weaknesses: we must make an objective assessment of Britain and the class contradictions as they are and as they will develop.

As we have said, the defining fight is now and will be for the foreseeable future the fight for national independence. Worldwide, capitalism seeks the free movement of capital, labour, goods and services in order to lower wages and other costs and increase exploitation. To do this it must destroy national sovereignty and further weaken the working class. It must prise control out of all hands but its own.

Most in the employing class side with finance capital, but a sizeable section is committed to Britain. These are a source of allies in the fight for independence. The traitor class is being buttressed by sections whose existence depends on free movement of people. These include private landlords – now numbering some two million, a recent phenomenon – whose profitability relies on the existence of millions of migrant workers. Support for capital also comes from the active connivance of the TUC and from well positioned elements within many unions which seek to undermine and deny the great referendum decision of 2016.

Despite them, the Brexit decision, which included many votes from trade union members, has transformed the possibilities for Britain. That the referendum was even held at all is a tribute to the working class’s stubborn resistance to the EU. That it was won has exposed weakness and disarray – in the enemy as well as in our own ranks.

Everything about the current situation is impelling workers to confront the question of national independence, of control. Continued mass immigration is lowering wages – especially real wages – as well as squeezing the provision of health, education, transport and housing. The continuing push towards free trade is further squeezing wages and awakening millions to the need for control and planning. “Austerity” – more correctly the deliberate transfer of wealth from workers to capitalists – demonstrates every day the consequences of lack of control. The threat of war persists (without control we cannot have peace). Disposable income has plummeted. Debt has soared. Our infrastructure remains a plaything for foreign companies.

British independence, through Brexit, after Brexit, is our battleground – and it is everywhere. There is not a single area of solid struggle where the concepts of independence and control cannot find an echo. The people will need its own organisation for the coming fight.

The road ahead will be hard. But we should never underestimate the significance of the referendum vote. It showed a spirit of irrepressibility among the working class, a refusal to be cowed by the politicians that claim to represent them or the establishment that claims to have their interests at heart. It showed the bedrock of independence of thought, a refusal to be told what to think and how to vote.

We must be brave, overcome our fear. Whether or not things go against us, there should be no doom and gloom. The magnificent Referendum decision cannot be undone, and leaving the EU will be at the centre of every political debate until it is achieved.