



britain's road
to socialism?

Britain's Road to Socialism?

Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist)
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Britain's Road to Socialism?

Ranjeet Brar, 2022

ISBN: 978-1-913286-07-1

First published in Britain by CPGB-ML, 2022

PO Box 78900, London, SW16 9PQ

Cover design by Rob Amos and Joti Brar.

Front cover photo: 7468995 © Rmaclochlainn | Dreamstime.com

Back photo: Tony Blair addresses British troops in Basra, Iraq, 2003.

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Britain's Road to Socialism?¹

To do justice to the task of analysing the latest edition of the Communist Party of Britain's programme, it must be acknowledged that it has a place in the history of the British working-class movement that means it cannot be lightly or glibly brushed aside.

The British Road to Socialism (BRS), first published in 1951, set the orientation of what was then the only communist party in Britain having organic links to both the British working-class movement and an international communist movement, centred around the Soviet Union and the growing camp of people's democracies which to all observers seemed on course to become the chief force in global politics.

In that sense, the *BRS* has been central to the history of the British working class over the last seventy years – whether all the members of that class are aware of this fact or not – and the analysis that follows reflects the fact that the document itself has expanded to fill some seventy pages, being itself the product of a continuous process of revision that has mirrored the history and the declining fortunes of the British and world communist movement.

The central premise of the *BRS*, however, has remained constant.

The dawn of communism in Britain

Britain's first communist party was formed in 1920 under the direct impetus of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia. Many of its leading comrades were themselves great working-class organisers, orators and propagandists, active in various socialist organisations (the British Socialist party, formerly the Social-Democratic Federation, the Socialist Labour party, the Clydeside Shop Stewards' Committee, The Workers' Socialist Federation and the South Wales Socialist Society) and they agreed, firstly, to throw their lot in together, to form a common organisation affiliated to the Third International, uniting their activity throughout the whole of Great Britain, and, secondly, to hammer out a common programme of struggle – on the insistence of none other than VI Lenin, who met with British socialists including John MacLean, Tom Quelch (son of Harry Quelch) and Jack Tanner at the second congress of the Comintern (the Third or 'Communist' International) in Russia.

The original Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) has many strengths and achievements to its credit that it is not our purpose to list here. Lenin's pamphlet *'Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder* (1920) was published during the proceedings of the second congress of the Comintern. William Gallacher, in *The Rolling of the Thunder** described both John McLean's initial outrage when he learned, on arriving in Moscow to participate in the deliberations of the International, that he had been dubbed a 'left-wing communist' by none other than the great Lenin, and his determination to defend his position – until he met with the force of logic and great benevolence of Lenin's arguments, given in person, and was won to the Leninist posi-

* William Gallacher, *The Rolling of the Thunder*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1948.

tion. McLean returned home and threw his full weight behind establishing the CPGB.

First edition of *The British Road to Socialism*

Fast forward through thirty tumultuous years of the Great Depression and second world war, through the victory of the Soviet Union's Red Army over fascism, the victories of China's Red Army and the founding of the People's Republic of China to 1951. Britain's original Communist party, the CPGB, published an electoral programme entitled *The British Road to Socialism*.*

This document replaced the previous programmes *For Soviet Britain* (1935) and *Class Against Class* (1929)* with a quite different notion of the tactics to be adopted by Britain's communists. It had the merit of being brief and relatively explicit, covering just eight short sections (the latest edition, by contrast, runs to seventy meandering and contradictory pages). It was published in the context of the postwar Labour government of Clement Attlee and after more than thirty years of experience of the Labour party in government. The 1951 election, in fact, returned Winston Churchill to power at the head of a Conservative administration.

In the opening lines of the CPGB's original 1951 programme, introduced by Harry Pollitt, we note that the *BRS* asked: 'Why has the Labour government thus failed the hopes of the people?' (Note that this is the postwar Labour government that today is often spoken of with reverence as being the 'originator of the NHS', and a model of true socialism). The answer it gave read as follows:

* The text of all the former CPGB's programmes can be read online in the party's collection on *Marxists.org*.

Because far from challenging the rights and privileges of big business at home and abroad, it has allied itself with big business against the people.

It joined hands with the Tories and the American big capitalists in an imperialist foreign policy which is ruining Britain.

The Labour government has formed a war bloc with American imperialism against the socialist Soviet Union, the New China, the people's democracies and the colonial peoples struggling for their national liberation and independence.

It has conducted wars against the peoples of Malaya and Korea. It has sold out Britain to American big business.

The Labour government has imposed a crushing rearmament programme for a new war at the expense of the social needs of the people.

The profits of the big trusts and monopolies are higher than they have ever been. Nine-tenths of the wealth of the country is still owned by one-tenth of the population. *The sham measures of nationalisation have only increased exploitation and put still heavier burdens on the workers to pay huge sums of compensation to the old owners.*

The capitalists have done exceptionally well under the Labour government; indeed, they have never been better off. The workers have paid for all this in low wages, higher prices and heavier taxation, while the Labour government has conducted an offensive against the workers' efforts to secure increased wages. Troops have been used in strikes, hard-won democratic rights have been ruthlessly attacked, strikers have been arrested and prosecuted, and collective bargaining has been turned into a farce by means of Order 1305 and compulsory arbitration.²

The talk of peace and socialism by the Labour leaders has

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proved to be a fraud and a deception.

The dominant Labour party leaders, Attlee, Bevin and Morrison – like MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas before them – have nothing in common with socialism or the interests of the working people. Their outlook and practice reflects that of the Tories and the wealthy ruling class whose interests they serve, and not the aims of the working people. They are in reality only a left wing of the Tories, like the old Liberal party.

Right-wing Labour policy has strengthened the Tories at home and the most reactionary governments abroad. It has confused, disorganised and split the working-class movement and the employers.

It has done this at a time when all over the world vast changes are taking place. A great part of eastern Europe has gone socialist, and the workers are in power. In the far east, the Chinese revolution has freed hundreds of millions from the landlords and the foreign bankers.

In the socialist Soviet Union, great peaceful schemes of new construction are raising the living standards of the people every year. Instead of bringing Britain into close association and friendship with these advancing countries, *the Labour leaders in Britain have joined in a united front with the Tories and the American millionaires to attack socialism and the national-liberation movements and to defend capitalism and imperialism.*

As a result, the Tories, who suffered a setback in the 1945 election, were able to advance again in 1950, and seek to return to open power.* (My emphasis)

This assessment of the Labour party must be endorsed whole-

* *The British Road to Socialism*, Programme of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1951.

heartedly – and contrasted to the current content both of the 2020 *BRS* and the *Morning Star*, in its appraisal of the Labour party – but in the next paragraph enters the rot, the sleight of hand by which the entire noble project of building a liberating party of the workers was to become its opposite:

If the people are to advance, both the Tories and their allies in the labour movement, the right-wing Labour leaders, must be fought and defeated.

The lesson of the failure of the Labour government is not the failure of socialism. It is the failure of Labour reformism and Labour imperialism, which is the servant of the big capitalist interests.

It is clear from this – with the benefit of hindsight, yes, but there were many who saw it at the time – that despite all the evidence quoted by the communist comrades of the CPGB in 1951, the writers of the *BRS* had not imbibed Lenin's opinion that the entire British Labour party was a 'bourgeois' labour party, a party that had workers in its ranks (more so then than now), but which followed bourgeois, capitalist policies against the workers' interests. Labour was, in fact, already in 1951, a proven party of imperialism.

Lenin's advice to British workers

In 1920, when he had cajoled the British delegates at the Third (Communist) International's congress into forming a united communist party, Lenin had also settled the dispute among them as to whether they should stand in elections, and, in doing so, to enter into electoral agreements with the Labour party, such that communist candidates would stand allied with Labour against the Liberals and Conservatives. (He refrained at

that time from giving his opinion on another major dispute as to whether affiliation to the Labour party was desirable, for want of adequate information.)³

At that time – in 1920, in the aftermath of WW1 and the Russian Revolution – Lenin gave the advice that British communists should enter into an electoral alliance with the Independent Labour Party, since (1) the latter had the overwhelming support of the workers; (2) Labour at that time had never formed a government, and the workers had not yet had any experience of its inevitable betrayals in practice; and (3) it was still possible to affiliate to the Labour party while maintaining the freedom to criticise its leaders and policies.⁴

Communists, wrote Lenin, should therefore support the Labour party 'as a rope supports a hanged man'.

Workers should be canvassed on the clear understanding that voting Labour would not bring socialism, but would show the limits of what a Labour party in government could offer:

'With my vote, I want to support Henderson in the same way as a rope supports a hanged man – that the impending establishment of a government of the Hendersons will prove that I am right, will bring the masses over to my side, and will hasten the political death of the Hendersons and the Snowdens [and MacDonalds] just as was the case with their kindred spirits in Russia and Germany.'

The purpose of the proposed 1920 electoral pact – on the basis of a direct agreement and an agreed split in MPs between Labour and Communist candidates [is such a proposition viable today?], the most vigorous agitation, organisation and freedom of criticism by communists within the Independent Labour party and the working class – was not to *embellish* social democracy

* VI Lenin, *'Left-Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder*, 1920.

but to *expose* and *destroy* it.

If further proof be needed of Lenin's attitude toward the Labour and TUC leaderships, his 'Letter to the British workers', written at the request of a 1920 TUC delegation to Russia with which he met, should be read and understood.*

The original sin of the BRS

Elections in the 1920s were very different from those in 1951, and even more radically different from those today. Following the experience of Labour governments led by Ramsay MacDonald and Clement Attlee, there was ample evidence – as the original 1951 *BRS* itself stated in its opening preamble – regarding the true nature and character of the Labour party.

Rather than use this evidence of Labour government crimes committed on behalf of Britain's bourgeoisie to hang Labour as a political organisation, to destroy it and build a political force representing the interests of the mass of the working class, the 1951 *BRS* programme considered that Labour 'as a whole' was still the mass party of workers, and that it could be 'won' for socialism and the working class by 'fighting its top right-wing leadership' from within.

There were other mistakes in the original *BRS*. The emphasis on US imperialism alone, rather than on joint Anglo-American imperialism as the agent of the cold war; a capitulation to pacifism at the dawn of the nuclear age, and the call for peaceful coexistence rather than a determined struggle against the British imperialists' warmongering; failure to state in unequivocal terms that the nations of the empire had a right to self-determination, and the idea that (even a socialist) Britain would

* 'Letter to the British workers' by VI Lenin, 17 June 1920. See appendix on p97 of this volume.

continue to have the same economic relations with those subjugated nations, etc.

But the key capitulation, the key error from which others stemmed, the *BRS's* 'original sin', was the idea that the British empire could be won for the working class by the simple means of an election, and that every institution and branch of the state could by this means be peacefully turned into an instrument of working-class rule.

Central to this amorphous concept of the 'conquest of imperialism' was the concept of conquering the Labour party – imperialist though it may be – as the central instrument for waging this reformist scheme.

Socialism means the abolition of capitalism. The Labour leaders do not want to abolish capitalism. [Quite right!]

At present this potentially mighty political force [the Labour movement, with the Labour party at its centre] is split and divided, misled by the propaganda of the ruling class and the policy and outlook of the right-wing leaders of the Labour party and the right-wing leaders of the trade unions and co-operative organisations, who in practice support the ruling class and carry on the Labour government in the interests of capitalism.

The enemies of communism accuse the Communist party of aiming to introduce Soviet power in Britain and abolish Parliament. This is a slanderous misrepresentation of our policy. Experience has shown that in present conditions the advance to socialism can be made just as well by a different road. For example, through people's democracy, without establishing Soviet power, as in the people's democracies of eastern Europe. [A most confused formulation – the 'people's democracies' were formed under the direct leadership of working-

class parties and coalitions in their respective countries, and on the basis of the overthrow of Nazi occupation at the end of WW2, at the hands of the liberating Soviet Red Army and the communist resistance. The former Nazi-collaborating bourgeois state apparatus of those countries had therefore been thoroughly discredited and destroyed by the course of the war. The same was not true in Britain.]

The people of Britain can transform capitalist democracy into a real people's democracy, *transforming Parliament, the product of Britain's historic struggle for democracy, into the democratic instrument of the will of the vast majority of her people* . . .

[They can] *break the political hold of the capitalist class by democratic reform*, democratic ownership of the press, the people's control of the BBC and the democratic transformation of the civil service, Foreign Office, armed forces and police, the law courts and the administration of justice. (My emphasis)

The British imperialist state can thus be 'won and used as an instrument of working-class rule' (together with high court judges, upper-class army generals, police chiefs, civil servants, the lords, the Crown itself perhaps?) by 'building up . . . a broad coalition or popular alliance of all sections of the working people'.

Building up a broad coalition or popular alliance of all sections of the working people means creating a new power in the land. It can only be done *against* the will and active opposition of the currently existing state, which exists precisely in order to preserve the rule of capital against such an eventuality; to perpetuate the conditions for exploitation of the working class.

To build up such an alliance requires a working-class party guided by the clearest consciousness, and not divided by the ideological and organisational influence of the enemy capitalist class. That is the whole meaning of, and reason for the victory

of, the Bolshevik struggle in Russia and the basis on which the Third International was created.

The idea that such a mighty working-class power, equivalent to the Soviets in the USSR, could be built in Britain, and then used merely as a pressure group on the imperialist Labour party, is absurd in conception, and has proved self-defeating in practice, as we shall see. 'The mountain has brought forth a mouse,' as Karl Marx would say.*

The Labour party, with its present policy and under its present leadership, is preventing the building up of such an alliance and splitting instead of uniting the working-class movement. [Therefore, we should surely counterpose the treacherous leadership and policy of the imperialist Labour party to that of a militant working-class party, and win workers to the correct line, to a party that represents their own interests? No! Conversely, the *BRS* went on to conclude that the communists must exert all their strength in an attempt to change the policy and leadership of that hostile Labour party!]

In order, therefore, to bring about a decisive change in Britain, the millions of workers in the trade unions, cooperatives and individual members' sections of the Labour party will have to use their political and industrial strength to make it impossible for either the right-wing Labour leaders or the Tories to carry on their present pernicious policy.

A people's parliament and government which draws its strength from a united movement of the people, with the working class as its core, will be able to mobilise the overwhelming majority of the people for decisive measures to break the economic and political power of the big exploiters . . .

* 'The bill for the abolition of feudal labour services' by Karl Marx, *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, No 60, July 1848.

A key role would be performed by the trade unions, without which no people's democracy can function. National arbitration would be abolished and full powers of collective bargaining on wages and conditions restored, the socialist economic plan ensuring the basis for steadily advancing wages and conditions.

All large-scale industry and transport, the banks, monopoly-owned wholesale and retail trading concerns, as well as large landed property, will be brought under social ownership by the people's state. [That is, by the Westminster parliament, the lords, the police and the army, as they stand.]

The national debt and stock representing compensation for industries previously nationalised will be annulled.

This socialist nationalisation differs fundamentally from the measures of capitalist nationalisation carried out by Tory, Liberal or Labour governments, which have nothing in common with socialism, and have aroused the widespread criticism of the workers . . . Thus these measures of state ownership were beneficial to capitalism as a whole, and in no way changed the capitalist character of British economy any more than similar measures carried out by Bismarck or Hitler, or British Tory governments in the past . . .

[All this] policy and programme is based on the impregnable foundation of Marxist theory. The science embodying the experiences of the international working class, as developed by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and demonstrated in history as the theory and practice which brings victory to the working class and socialism. History proves that without such a party the battle for socialism cannot be won.

The 1951 *BRS* was, to be sure, far more class-conscious and frank than the latest edition, but the foundation stone of all subsequent errors was already there to be seen.

Marx's teaching on the state

The ideas of the 1951 *BRS* stand in glaring opposition to Marx's most fundamental teaching on the state, deduced from the living experience of the Paris Commune of 1871, and summed up in his work *The Civil War in France*, which reached the conclusion that the proletariat could not simply lay hold of the ready-made apparatus of the bourgeois state and wield it for its own purposes.

The last preface to the new German edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, signed by both its authors, is dated 24 June 1872 [ie, after the experience of the Paris Commune, which revealed the practical measures that the working class of Paris took to ensure their political power]. In this preface the authors, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, say that the programme of the *Communist Manifesto* 'has in some details become out-of-date', and then go on to say:

'One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz, that *'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes . . .'*'* (Lenin's emphasis)[†]

The *British Road to Socialism* was a departure from the revolutionary line of the international communist movement at the time, and a controversial document from its inception, enshrining as it did the anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist notion of British exceptionalism, of Britain being sufficiently 'mature and developed' as to be able to embark upon a non-revolutionary road to

* K Marx, *The Civil War in France*, 1871.

† VI Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, 1917.

the working class gaining state power.

That road could and would be possible, asserted the CPGB in its *BRS*, not through a process of conflict with the British imperial class, which would be 'abhorrent' to the British working class and its 'traditions', but rather via the peaceful election of a coalition of Communist and Labour MPs who would use Parliament as a platform for progressive reforms to bring about socialism.

To an extent, this theoretical confusion had grown out of the practical truce made during World War Two between the imperialist Labour party (which had shown its true colours in World War One along with the now defunct, but partially resurrected, Second International) and the Third International-affiliated Communist party, and was due to the temporary exigencies of the wartime alliance between imperialist Britain and the mighty proletarian USSR.

But the post-second world war Labour party was quite clear that, along with its imperial master, it was back on the anticommunist cold warpath – as amply proven by Clement Attlee's key role in the founding of the warmongering imperialist North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato). It had been the brilliance of Soviet diplomacy that had frustrated the will of the British and American imperialists to see the USSR crushed by Nazi Germany, and had forced them, against their will, to confront the Nazi beast militarily. Labour, along with its imperialist masters, it seems, understood this better than the CPGB.

The rise of revisionism and the demise of the USSR

The ascent of Nikita Khrushchev in the USSR after 1953, and particularly after the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, initiated the gradual dismantling of the economic and political programme of Soviet social-

ism, its slide back towards capitalist market economics, and its eventual disintegration and collapse.

This change in line from Moscow meant that the *BRS*, rather than being discarded quickly, increasingly dovetailed with the developing interests of the revisionist communist leadership. The *BRS* (now *Britain's Road to Socialism*) subsequently went through six further iterations, principally at times of election, when its contents and language were felt to be too outdated to have ongoing resonance, but the essence of its tactical programme did not change.

The CPGB's final version of *Britain's Road to Socialism* was published just before its forty-first congress in 1989 when, amidst the counter-revolutions in the European people's democracies and in the USSR itself, the 'Eurocommunist' faction of the party, grouped around its magazine *Marxism Today*, dissolved the party, sinking under the weight of its increasing burden of revisionism and capitulation to the pressures of imperialism, and passed a resolution declaring that 'Communism was a mistake of historic proportions'.

It was a sad and sorry spectacle, but a logical conclusion to the abandonment of the practice and theory of class struggle and Marxist-Leninist analysis.

The revisionist programme outlives the revisionist party

In the process of disintegration, however, the old CPGB gave rise to several decaying splinters and factions, including the Communist Party of Britain – Marxist Leninist (CPB-ML), the New Communist Party (NCP) and the Communist Party of Britain (CPB).

Several of these organisations took issue with the content of that self-annihilatory resolution, and with the politics of

Eurocommunism that had prepared the ground for its ignominious passage, and considered that there may indeed be an ongoing role for Marxist-Leninist teachings to guide British workers, who undeniably remained firmly in their former place of exploitation and subordination – irrespective of the decline and collapse of the land of the Soviets.

This was a crisis moment in the history of the communist movement. Without reflecting on the processes that led to this moment, none could continue to maintain their ideology and activity amongst the working class. ‘Hasn’t communism failed?’ was the question on every worker’s lips – placed there by the triumphal imperialist bourgeoisie, via its politicians, press and academics. This question could only be answered correctly – in the negative – by serious study and historical analysis.

What was right and should be preserved in our glorious working-class revolutionary history and tradition? Where did Russian communism then go wrong, and what lessons should be learned if we are to avoid repeating those mistakes?⁵

The great misfortune of those splinter groups, which stayed aloof from the deliberations and practices of the anti-revisionist movement, was that they had insulated themselves from the mechanisms of self-criticism and democratic centralism by which any serious political party of workers could – and periodically must – correct its line.

Formation of the Communist Party of Britain

The Communist Party of Britain (CPB) broke *organisationally* from its antecedent, forming itself in 1988, but not politically, in that it retained the essence of the 1951 revisionist CPGB programmatical weakness in its new *Britain’s Road to Socialism*, which it republished in 2000 and again in 2011.

That 2011 version, afraid to ignore completely the question

of the counter-revolution in the USSR, offered this frankly anti-communist assessment of the Soviet Union:

Russia and the other countries of the Soviet Union were transformed from semi-feudal, semi-capitalist monarchist dictatorships into modern societies with near-full employment, universally free education and healthcare, affordable housing for all, extensive and cheap public transport, impressive scientific and cultural facilities, rights for women and degrees of self-government for formerly oppressed nationalities.

This was achieved through a world historic break with capitalist ownership and social relations, on the basis of social ownership of industry and centralised economic planning.

But [Shchedrin's 'but!', as Lenin would say] the struggle to survive and to build socialism in the face of powerful external as well as internal enemies also led to distortions in society that might otherwise have been avoided. In particular, a bureaucratic-command system of economic and political rule became entrenched.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the trade unions became integrated into the apparatus of the state, eroding working-class and popular democracy. Marxism-Leninism was used dogmatically to justify the status quo rather than make objective assessments of it.

At times, and in the late 1930s in particular, severe violations of socialist democracy and law occurred. Large numbers of people innocent of subversion or sabotage were persecuted, imprisoned and executed. This aided the worldwide campaign of lies and distortions aimed at the Soviet Union, the international communist movement and the concept of socialism.*

* Socialism – the lessons so far, *Britain's Road to Socialism* (eighth edition), Communist Party of Britain, 2011, pp16-17.

But if such events were in fact the norm in the USSR, then the 'worldwide campaign of anti-Soviet lies' was in fact a worldwide campaign of anti-Soviet *truth*, was it not, bold CPB revisionist gurus?

If the 'command' (planned) economy is a failed idea, then what is the economic programme of socialism? If trade union and mass Communist party leadership of the working class was not a huge expansion of working-class power, of working-class democracy, then what was it? And why did the CPGB, and even the CPB's *BRS*, in fact call for the involvement of the trade union movement in its 'broad coalition' that would bring socialism to Britain?

The 1930s was indeed a time of fierce class struggle throughout the world. And at that time the Soviet Union, the CPSU(B) and the Comintern faithfully represented the interests of the working class, in the USSR and globally. To assert otherwise is to assert that there was no positive contribution to mankind's liberation made by the victorious workers' and peasants' revolutionary Soviet government following the Great October Revolution of 1917.

To assert otherwise is to agree with the renegacy of the Eurocommunist rabble who passed negative judgement on the glorious October Revolution – the workers' and peasants' rebellion in Russia, led by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, which 'broke the iron circle of imperialist relations' – and, with their petty-bourgeois defeatism, stated it to be 'a mistake of historic proportions', before quitting the field of struggle and embezzling the party's hard-won funds.

A more abject capitulation and self-certification of bankruptcy would be hard for any 'communist' to compose.

CPB will not stand in elections – just support Labour (2017-20)

The coincidence of its own decline and its total capitulation to Corbynism – heralded as the much dreamt-of 'left Labour leadership' – led the CPB to issue the following statement in the run-up to the 2017 general election, seized upon by the bourgeois media for their own reasons of seeking to discredit Jeremy Corbyn:

The Communist Party of Britain will not field election candidates for the first time since its formation in 1920 [the CPB was, in fact, formed in 1988] in order to throw its weight behind Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party.

Declaring its endorsement of Labour's leader, the Communist Party of Britain said victory for Mr Corbyn at the general election in June would be 'the first step towards a formation of a left-led government at Westminster'.

The party's general secretary Robert Griffiths added that it was crucial to stop the Labour leader facing a leadership challenge from 'right-wing' figures in his own party. He added his party was in 'no doubt' that Mr Corbyn's party 'serves the interests of workers and their families'.*

So much, then, for the much-cherished vision of a people's government based upon a 'coalition of Labour *and Communist* MPs'!

* 'General election: British Communist party will not field any candidates and throws support behind Jeremy Corbyn' by Ashley Cowburn, *Independent*, 24 April 2017.

Rebirth of the CPB as an electoral 'force'?

Yet, claiming to have learned from Corbyn's defeat, which saw the active participation – in fact, gleeful cooperation – of the Labour party apparatus and leadership (exactly what the CPB leadership has learned is not at all clear!), now in 2021, the CPB's leaders have found it in themselves, as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, once again to declare that standing for elections is the order of the day. And what better way to enter a bourgeois parliamentary election than to republish the party's *Britain's Road to Socialism* manifesto?

Since the collapse of Project Corbyn and the destruction of Labour's 'red wall' of loyal electoral seats in the wake of its betrayal of Brexit, much has changed. We stand in the midst of an economic crisis in which a further 8 percent of the workforce are set to lose their jobs in the coming three months (raising the numbers of the economically inactive from 26 to 34 percent of the working-age population – ie, another 2.6 million workers – from 8.5 million to a staggering total of 11.1 million working age adults).*

Labour's new leader, Sir Keir Starmer, is reasserting an openly Blairite doctrine in the Labour party, arguably to the right of the Conservatives. More workers than in living memory are questioning the political status quo, and new formations – such as the Workers party, led by George Galloway and Joti Brar – have emerged as a force for anti-capitalist and pro-socialist politics.

So, having paid our £3.00 for a copy (who else other than its determined critics will bother to do so is an interesting question in itself!), let us turn to the meat of the 2020 *BRS* document and see what it has to offer.

* 'About 2.6 million UK workers expect to be fired soon' by Lucy Meakin, *Bloomberg*, 17 February 2021.

The 2020 BRS

Sadly, there is little advance in the overall strategy of the document, which essentially repeats the formulation that Labour is the mass party of the working class. Some minor additions tend to compound rather than mitigate the fundamental flaws in its social-democratic thinking, with increasing pandering to Scottish, Welsh and Cornish (yes, Cornish!) 'nationalism', and the seeping petty-bourgeois poison of identity politics and intersectionalism.

In his poetic and incisive commentary *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, replete with historical lessons on the nature of the state and the use the working-class movement can make of it, Karl Marx made the penetrating observation that

All great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.*

What, then, are we to say of this ninth reiteration of the BRS? It was launched with a whimper, rather than a fanfare. Writing in the *Morning Star*, one author stated:

The will, however sincere, to reform capitalism from within has been shown again and again to be insufficient to the task. [Yes]

However great the attempts to curb its worst excesses, they run up against two great obstacles.

First, for as long as the fundamental basis of capitalism remains unchanged, the profit motive . . . remains the driving force of society, the final arbiter of all struggles. Therefore, re-

* Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852.

formist attempts to create a 'humane' capitalism are like King Canute trying to hold back the sea. [Yes.]

Second, even on their own terms, without setting their sights on the ultimate prize – the conquest of state power – they are doomed to failure. [Yes]

As the recent experience of the Corbyn project shows, the entire political, legal, military, media structure is set up to prevent any fundamental challenge to the prerogatives of capital. [Yes, although Corbyn and the Labour party, of course, represented no such fundamental challenge.]

Witness, for example, the secret-service personnel who claimed Corbyn was not fit to be prime minister and must be stopped, or the serving general who promised a 'mutiny' of the armed forces in the event of a Corbyn victory, or the consistent media onslaught and constant political briefing (some of it only coming to light this week) throughout his time as Labour leader. [Yes, although how misguided these half-hearted interventions were, perhaps even against the interests of capitalism in crisis, in all likelihood, will be shown in time.]

These put lie to the idea that electing a left government would be enough.

There is no parliamentary route to socialism. We must not confuse government office with state power: nothing short of a revolution can reset the trajectory of our society.

[But wait . . .] That is not to say that reforms under capitalism cannot improve things for workers and should not be supported. They can, and they should.

Most, if not all, of the rights we currently have under capitalism are the product of such reforms and in many cases, workers have sacrificed their liberty or even their lives to achieve them.

Some reforms go further and conflict not just with the im-

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mediate drive to profits but with *the fundamental conditions of reproduction of capitalism*.

Struggle for these reforms provokes deeper conflict with capital, which cannot be resolved within the system. This, then, leads to a direct need to challenge not just capital, but capitalism itself. [And how will that challenge be effected? And by whom? And with what ideological and organisational preparation?]

As capitalism becomes more and more moribund and crisis-prone, the number of people whose daily lives are blighted by the system increases. [Yes]

It is our job to unite these people in a *broad democratic anti-monopoly alliance*, with the working class at its heart, in order to change our society through our own action. [Ah yes, the 'broad democratic anti-monopoly alliance' of the Labour party?]

Many workers are looking now for a way forward. They see the problems with the current system but may not be sure of the way forward.

This includes young workers, casualised workers, those on the frontline against the virus.

It includes those new to the movement and those more experienced who were enthused by Corbyn's message of hope and the challenge his leadership of the Labour party presented to neoliberalism, if not to capitalism itself. [But did Corbyn in fact represent anything of the sort? This is not a sincere attempt to learn any lessons, but rather a dogmatic repetition of the same tired formula: that we must win the Labour party 'for the workers' and 'for socialism'.]*

* 'Why you should read the Communist party's programme', *Morning Star Online*. This online edition does not provide a date of publication or author.

The 2011 edition includes a summary page expressing its main ideas in bullet points, and laying out the CPB's immediate parliamentary strategy. The 2020 edition carries a summary which is virtually identical, punctuated by a small amount of greenwashing.

The heart of the 2020 BRS: support for the Labour party

The central premise of the entire programme remains the idea that

... through an upsurge in working-class and popular action, a left government can be elected in Britain based on parliamentary majorities of Labour, socialist, communist and progressive representatives, and strengthened by the election of left majorities in Scotland and Wales.

Forget that Jeremy Corbyn, their favoured left candidate, was deposed by the Labour party itself; forget the fact that his successor Keir Starmer is proving to be an inept but staunchly right-wing Blairite, and that Blair himself is making an increasingly visible comeback at the fringes of government and Labour party policy – notably laying out the Covid vaccination strategy on behalf of his monopolist sponsors.

Undeterred, the key points continue relentlessly:

A socialist society can then be built [How? By whom? With what political and organisational preparation?] in which wealth and power are held in common and used in a planned way for the benefit of all, with the working class and its allies liberating the people from all forms of exploitation and oppression. [We shall return to the question of who are the 'allies' of the proletariat later.]

The fantasy continues, as the plan unfurls, bullet point by point. Labour in government will then:

Put an end to British imperialism – the exercise of monopoly-capitalist exploitation and power in other parts of the world – is the biggest contribution we can make to international liberation and socialism.

No doubt this 'dismantling of British imperialism' by a left-Labour government will proceed in the manner of Jeremy Corbyn's great left-Labour shadow administration: denouncing Chinese steel production as being the real cause of the industrial crisis of overproduction and therefore the cause of the loss of British manufacturing jobs?*

By denouncing the 'violence' of the socialist government of Venezuela? By calling for a free parliamentary vote on the issue of whether to rain cruise missiles on the people of Syria aimed at toppling that country's democratically elected government and supporting the Isis proxy wahhabi thugs in their partition of its land to boost monopolist oil profits in the middle east?

By supporting the renewal of British imperialism's nuclear arsenal (Trident)? Or acceding to the demand that the Palestinians be labelled 'antisemitic' for their opposition to being annihilated by the state of Israel (see the IHRA definition of antisemitism sponsored by Corbyn et al)?†

Yes, we are confident that in this manner the CPB can build a platform of perpetual opposition, for it certainly poses no threat to British imperialism, let alone the Labour party social-imperialists it would warmly embrace, if only it could get close enough.

And still its leaders have the nerve to state that the 2020 *BRS*

* 'Steel industry in terminal decline', *Proletarian*, December 2015.

† 'The mixed message of the IHRA definition of antisemitism', *Proletarian*, October 2018.

. . . programme is based on the study, analysis and assessment of concrete realities, tendencies and trends. It is a guide to action, not a speculative prediction or a dogmatic blueprint. It is a living, developing programme to be constantly tested in practice and reassessed in the light of experience.

Presumably they have not got round to evaluating the results of seventy years of 'testing' of the *BRS* programme in practice (the dissolution of the CPGB, for example?; the waning of the communist movement as a force in Britain?), or realised that the test result is 'failure' – demanding the programme's wholesale revision.

Albert Einstein used to say:

'The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.'

Perhaps one of our readers will inform the petrified deities of the CPB central committee of the predicament in which they find themselves.

Can a 'popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance' be built upon 'the labour movement' based on 'a parliamentary majority for the Labour party'?

The CPB in its 2011 *BRS*, repeated in 2020, gave a central place, in fact the central place, to this 'formula', this 'plan of action', this 'programme' for achieving socialism in Britain – the idea that we must elect a majority Labour government at the centre of an anti-monopoly alliance.

One should pause to reflect that, in 2011, this demand was issued *just three years after Gordon Brown*, the Labour leader who had been Blair's chancellor of the exchequer for a decade

and then became the British prime minister, *had spearheaded the global bailing out of the banks*, in Britain offering Barclays, Royal Bank of Scotland et al some *£850 billion*, gratis from the taxpayer, thus transferring all the bad gambling debts from the billionaire parasites of finance capital to the British state, and preponderantly to the working-class taxpayer, and so ushering in a decade of austerity – austerity that, far from rectifying the fundamental flaws of monopoly capitalism, has led inexorably to the worst-ever global recession of 2020/21, triggered (but not caused) by the 2019-21 coronavirus pandemic.

This is not Labour acting as the 'centre of an anti-monopoly alliance' to 'diminish the means of reproduction of the capitalist system itself'! This is the polar opposite phenomenon. This is Labour using the bourgeois state apparatus and all its political, economic, diplomatic, financial, media (and cultural) machinery, to save the monopoly capitalists from the depredations of their own doctrine of free-market fundamentalism.

This is 'socialism for the billionaires'. This is an *anti-democratic alliance* of the Labour party leadership and the monopolists, *conspiring against* the mass of the British nation – workers, petty-bourgeois and even small and medium-sized capitalists – to transfer the debts and liabilities of the oligarchs of the market system away from these gamblers and onto the backs of the British masses.

Apparently unaware of, or if aware then unable to see, the contradiction between reality and the CPB's 'programme', the 2011 *BRS* pines for

. . . a left government [to] be elected in Britain based on parliamentary majorities in the Labour, socialist, communist and progressive representatives, and strengthened by the election of left majorities in Scotland and Wales.

'The drooping flowers may pine for love, but the heartless

brook babbles on!' Shorn of all euphemism, and observing the parliamentary results obtained by the much diminished and, honestly speaking, politically insignificant CPB, this amounts to: (1) giving a pass to Scottish and Welsh nationalism, to bourgeois separatism, which the CPB lacks the will or the means to fight; and (2) overwhelmingly supporting and canvassing for a Labour government.⁶

Form and content of the BRS

And here we must state that *Britain's Road to Socialism* is a 'political programme' of a peculiar type. It does not take the form of a series of statements upon which are predicated the goals, orientations and plans of the party. You will seek in vain for any telling evidence of analysis of the class structure of Britain, or of the alliances of class forces that can be built at any stage of the struggle for socialism. There is no clear exposition of Marxist-Leninist ideas, though these are what the *BRS* professes to follow, or of how these should be concretely applied to twenty-first-century Britain.

Rather, the *BRS* takes from the outset the form of a meandering historical sketch of the last one hundred and fifty years, which attempts to give some sort of background, justification or rationale for its bullet-point summary, and its central concept that the Labour party should form the backbone of the workers' assault on capital.

But this insipid and lifeless sketch not only glosses over most of the salient features and events of the twentieth century and the political landscape of Britain, it fails even to come to terms with the history of the party. Perhaps that is why, although formed in 1988, the CPB recently and rather confusingly celebrated its 'centenary'.

A split in the working-class movement

Nowhere in the 2011 *BRS*, or its 2020 revision, is there any recognition that Britain's monopoly capitalist or imperialist economy has implications for the political formations of the British working class. Yet Engels' and Lenin's profound observations that the British imperialists *had engendered a split in the working class* are a central feature of their writings.

Nowhere does the CPB, in the ninth iteration of the *BRS*, mention that the Labour party was *from its inception* the representative of the upper stratum of privileged workers (the labour aristocracy), who had allied themselves with the ruling class and had at every opportunity vociferously fought for the preservation and maintenance of the system of imperialism, of capitalist exploitation in Britain and superexploitation of the colonies.

Peripheral mention is made of the antiwar movement, but no mention is made of the fact that, within living memory, the most brutal, in fact genocidal, imperialist wars – the 2003 Iraq war (and ongoing occupation), the 2001 Afghan war (which ended only in 2021), the 2000 invasion of Sierra Leone, the 1999 Yugoslav war – took place *under the leadership of the Labour party*. No mention, in fact, is made of any of Labour's thousand crimes against the workers of Britain and the world.

British imperialist history, where it is touched upon, is sketched simply as being the work of 'Britain's ruling class'. Quite so. But very little attention, for a political programme, is given to the political mechanisms by which British ruling-class democracy operates via its faithful representatives in Parliament – not only Conservative and Liberal, but also, and centrally, Labour.

In fact, both Labour and Conservative parties are equally the representatives of the monopoly capitalists (as indeed is the

Scottish National party)), meaning that the idea that voting in a Labour party government will bring the workers' salvation one step closer is about as true as the idea that voting for Barack Obama on a Democrat ticket ended racism and liberated workers in the United States of America, or that Kamala Harris, were she to accede to the presidential office, would bring women's emancipation.

Nowhere is it admitted that the working-class electorate must, in the last analysis, be the voting fodder for *all* bourgeois parties. Rather, undue emphasis is placed on the connection between the Labour party and the trade union movement, as furnishing proof that the Labour party is ultimately the party of the working class. But the nature and history of that connection is studiously avoided.

Mussolini's fascist party also had a very regimented and formal relationship with the trade union movement. That did not make either the vehicle for advancing the interest of the working class. Quite the reverse.

In short, while alluding to them in passing, we find that the *BRS* demonstrates no real understanding of imperialism, and no real understanding of Marx's profound teaching on the state. Any honest appraisal of Labour as a potential party of socialism must at least mention its manifold historical betrayals – which span, now, some one hundred and twenty years of British history.

Instead, the CPB regales us in the *BRS* with fairy tales dreaming that

A popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance can be built, led by the labour movement [always, in the mouths of CPB supporters, simply a synonym for the Labour party], to fight for a left-wing programme of policies that would make inroads into the wealth and power of the monopoly capitalists.

'Inroads into the wealth and power of the monopoly capitalists' such as the 2003 Iraq war, perhaps? Which so enriched the arms manufacturers and oil conglomerates that Labour prime minister and war criminal Tony Blair has been rewarded personally to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds?

'Inroads into the wealth and power of the monopoly capitalists' such as the 2008 banking bailout, in which the Labour party gifted £850 billion to the financial oligarchs precisely to protect them from being bankrupted by the workings of the capitalist market itself, that much-trumpeted arbiter of 'efficiency through competition'?

Or the 'inroads into the wealth and power of the monopoly capitalists' that Corbyn and his Trotskyite hangers-on failed to make when they proved incapable of getting the Labour party machine to support even their limited reformist schemes between 2015 and 2019?

Under the influence of this profound theoretical guidance from the elder statesmen of the CPB, it is no wonder that the Young Communist League (YCL) has been taken over by a petty-bourgeois student coterie infected by the liberal ideology of intersectionalist identity politics.⁷

(Mis)understanding imperialism

Britain's Road to Socialism wisely informs us that

The chief characteristics of imperialism, therefore, are monopolisation, colonial or – in countries that have won formal political independence – neocolonial superexploitation, inter-imperialist rivalry and war.

VI Lenin defined the chief characteristics of capitalist economics in its monopolist, decadent and parasitic stage as be-

ing: (1) monopoly in manufacture; (2) monopoly in banking; (3) the merger of manufacture and banking capital to form finance capital; (4) the complete division of the world's markets between the monopolist trusts, syndicates and cartels and an increase in the export of capital over the export of commodities; (5) the complete division of the world among the great imperialist powers.*

That these economic phenomena remain the root cause of global inequality and strife today has been amply demonstrated elsewhere.†

Accordingly, the main contradictions of our monopoly capitalist world emerged: (1) between labour and capital; (2) between the imperialist countries and the exploited nations; and (3) between the major imperialist powers and groups of imperialist powers themselves.‡

Further, owing to the uneven development of capitalist states, there is a periodic drive for *redivision* of the world and its colonies, on the basis of the changed economic strengths of the leading imperialist nations and groups of nations, leading to wars to determine which of them are to gain possession of the richest territories and have access to the greatest share of the world's colonial wage-slaves, markets, avenues for investment and natural resources to exploit and plunder.

This process has been accelerating, particularly since Margaret Thatcher's government (like Reagan's in the USA) made it an ideological principle to deindustrialise Britain in favour of the interests of finance capital, and that is why such a large section of the working population of Britain is involved in financial and other services – ie, in helping to administer the exploitation of workers overseas. That is also why our armed forces are constantly involved in invading nations abroad: to protect the

* VI Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1916.

† Harpal Brar, *Imperialism – Decadent, Parasitic, Moribund Capitalism*, 1997.

‡ 'The three contradictions of imperialism', *Proletarian*, October 2004.

financial investments and profits of the transnational corporations. Hence the preponderance of the financial magnates of the City of London.

The decay of capitalism is manifested in the creation of a huge stratum of rentiers, capitalists who live by 'clipping coupons'.*

The vast wealth and power of billionaires like Warren Buffett is based upon the value of their stock-market portfolios, which is based in turn upon the real work performed by hundreds of millions of workers all over the globe, as well of course as on the speculative share-dealing that accompanies the global capitalist casino, particularly when the real economy is in a most profound crisis owing to mass impoverishment of humanity on a global scale (and hence contraction of markets and decreasing satisfaction of the wants and needs of the planet's working population).

Moreover, said Lenin, it is a feature of monopoly capitalism that the imperialist nations, having secured vast avenues of loot from their colonies, bribe a section of their domestic working class in order to secure social peace at home and the best possible conditions for their continued looting of the world.

The opportunists (social-chauvinists) are working hand in glove with the imperialist bourgeoisie precisely towards creating *an imperialist Europe on the backs of Asia and Africa* . . . objectively, the opportunists are a section of the petty bourgeoisie and of a certain strata of the working class who have been bribed out of imperialist superprofits and converted to watchdogs of capitalism and corruptors of the labour movement.†

They can do so on the basis of superprofits secured from

* VI Lenin, *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*, 1916.

† VI Lenin, *ibid*.

heightened and intensified exploitation of the masses in their colonial empires – and after the purely bourgeois liberation struggles that followed the second world war, the continued superexploitation of the economically neocolonised ‘third world’, where wages and living conditions are so low that profit margins are dramatically increased.

This is the meaning of the term ‘export of capital’ and the reason why Britain and the United States are increasingly becoming ‘service economies’. It is why the gap in wealth between the rich and poor countries continues to increase despite all show of ‘charity’, ‘development aid’, United Nations charters, etc. It is the reason that seven or eight of the world’s richest billionaires have between them more wealth than the poorest half of the planet’s working people (all 3.75 billion of them).

Thus – owing to the split in socialism engendered by imperialist corruption of the labour movement – ‘the Great War’ (the 1914-18 first world war) saw the wholesale betrayal of socialism by most European socialist parties, prominent among them the Labour party, which revealed itself unequivocally to be a party of imperialism.⁸

That is why Lenin said that in campaigning in elections communists should state clearly that:

‘With my vote, I want to support Henderson in the same way as a rope supports a hanged man – that the impending establishment of a government of the Hendersons will prove that I am right, will bring the masses over to my side, and will hasten the political death of the Hendersons and the Snowdens.’

But of this split in the working class, and the historical role of the Labour party, the CPB’s programme, reprinted in its ninth edition in the year 2020, fully one hundred and four years after the conflagration of that terrible war, breathes not a word.

Class collaboration and social democracy

In the leading capitalist economies, the prolonged period of postwar expansion – made possible by state intervention, the STR, the rebuilding of Germany and Japan and rising productivity – was based on a ruling-class strategy of promoting class collaboration. Workers would enjoy job security, social benefits, employment rights and ever-higher living standards, while their trade union and political representatives would seek only to reform capitalism, not to challenge or abolish it.*

For a brief period, all workers benefited materially from this postwar boom in Britain, but a privileged minority received the lion's share of those benefits, and their political representative was the Labour party.

The ninth edition of the *BRS* breezes past the renewed colonial wars waged by Britain and the USA to retain their economic domination after the second world war, without mentioning the key role played by the Labour party in setting up the aggressive Nato imperialist alliance, or Labour's role in waging genocidal wars against the peoples' popular, and often communist-led resistance in Malaya and Korea, Labour's suppression of the national-liberation movement in Kenya with fascistic collective punishments and concentration camps, or Labour's role in the partition of India.

On page 7 of the 2020 *BRS*, we read that

Interimperialist rivalry was moderated by the common drive to wage the cold war against the Soviet Union and its allies – hence the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

* *BRS*, p7.

(Nato) in 1949 – and ‘hot war’ in Korea and Vietnam,

yet there is not a word of criticism for the Labour government of Clement Attlee, which was the leading force in building the anticommunist alliance of the imperialist forces, under the hegemony of the USA and Britain – an alliance which persists in its terrorism today, with key roles in wars against Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya in particular. Not to speak of its strategic goals of global domination, encroachment on Russia and China, and provocation of the war in Ukraine.

Nor was this the only arena in which Labour pursued its bitterly anticommunist agenda on behalf of British imperialism.

On page 9 of the 2020 *BRS*, there is a reference to British imperialism’s drive to war and a declaration that

Consequently, bombing missions or full-scale military invasions have been launched against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Syria and Somalia.

Again, the elephant in the room is the fact that the Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown played the leading role in justifying, driving on, cheerleading and perpetrating fully five out of seven of those wars, while the Labour opposition under ‘Red’ Ed Miliband actively supported and collaborated in the prosecution of the others – as, in fact, Labour continued to do under the ‘leadership’ of the great left hope that was Jeremy Corbyn.

Labour, it must be admitted, is a fully-fledged imperialist party. As such, it is the height of hypocrisy for the CPB to don ‘anti-imperialist’ garb while constantly driving the diminishing band of workers and intellectuals under its influence into Labour’s imperialist fold.

Capitalist crisis

Moving on to the general crisis of capitalism, the *BRS* notes, correctly, that:

For much of the twentieth century, communists referred to the all-round 'general crisis of capitalism'. Its chief features were identified as:

The sharpening of capitalism's contradictions, the growth of monopoly, the dislocation in the distribution of the capitalist surplus, conflicts within the capitalist class, economic stagnation and instability, increasing state intervention in the economy and deepening class conflict.

The degeneration of capitalist politics, ideology, morality and culture with their demagoguery, careerism, corruption, egoism and callousness.

The crisis and overthrow of imperialism's colonial system [only to change its form into financial domination, the 'cold' war struggle to retain that financial domination, and then the re-emergence of open colonial wars after 1991].

The emerging challenge from the forces of socialism led by the Soviet Union and the international socialist system.

But then capitalism 'stabilised' and socialism decayed, says the *BRS*. This was not, however, a simple case of 'overestimating socialism' and 'underestimating capitalism', but rather the fact that there was a life-and-death struggle played out across the globe in the political and economic, diplomatic, military and cultural spheres. And, crucially, we must ask: *where did Labour stand during these years?*

The answer is that *the Labour party sided firmly with 'its own'*

British imperialist class, and mounted a rearguard action to retain every possible privilege of capital. Is there any hint in the *BRS* that Labour acted as the real conductor of bourgeois influence into the working-class movement during this crucial period? That the Labour party played a global counter-revolutionary role on behalf of British capitalism? Again, not a word.

Skip forward, and we are told:

From 2008, mass unemployment returned to the record post-war levels of the early 1980s as living standards plummeted and public and social services were cut to the bone.

Across the developed capitalist world, governments and central banks then had to rescue the financial monopolies and their markets with the biggest bail-outs in history, using public money and public institutions to do so. In effect, they nationalised the debts and liabilities, forced the working class to pay for them through austerity policies and then restored the banks to the private sector once they had returned to profitability.

Since then, the capitalist monopolies have reaped most of the benefits of recovery and expansion, while workers increasingly face precarious employment, worsening conditions, wage and pension cuts, housing problems and loss of services.*

So close to agreement we find ourselves – but who was the British prime minister who organised, not ‘inroads into the wealth and power of the monopoly capitalists’, but the reverse, their bail-out and the largest transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich that history had seen until that point – now dwarfed by Donald Trump’s \$3 trillion ‘Covid’ bail-out of Wall Street in 2020, and Joe Biden’s similar bail-out at the dawn of his office in 2021? None other than Labour prime minister Gordon Brown.

* *BRS*, p11.

In the sphere of politics, big business influence has nurtured naked careerism, hypocrisy and corruption.*

Yes, indeed. And we need look no further than any Labour MP (and particularly prime ministers Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, and ministers and front-benchers such as Alastair Campbell, Labour health secretaries Patricia Hewitt and Alan Milburn, implacably hawkish imperial warmongering 'defence' secretaries George Robertson and Geoff Hoon, David Blunkett, former Labour leader and his wife Neil and Glenda Kinnock, who worked so assiduously to undermine the great miners' strike of 1984 and then for decades were keen to pocket every euro from their cosy Brussels MEP salaries . . . the list is long and damning) to see that the rot in Labour social democracy runs deep. What paragons of 'socialist' careerist virtue!

Racism

Popular disillusionment and anger can also find expression in support for the political forces of the far right and fascism. These propose false and nationalistic, xenophobic or racist remedies for people's real or perceived problems.†

Fascism is not nearly so prevalent in Britain as Labour would have us believe. It's an often-used bogey to call out the party's vote. What are far more prevalent are the illusions in British imperialism fostered by all our mainstream parties, and in particular amongst the working class by Labour social democracy – and all of these parties are prone to playing the race card (the anti-muslim card, the anti-immigrant card) to divide workers

* *BRS*, p14.

† *BRS*, p14.

and to 'appeal' to the 'native' (not only white, but any section that has been resident for more than one generation, in fact) working class.

Labour's racist policy of subjecting Asian women to virginity testing to ascertain whether they were really coming to Britain to marry their husbands must rank among the most unpleasant and xenophobic policies implemented by any British imperialist government.*

And then, of course, there was the same Labour government of James Callaghan, which was perfectly happy to send the Special Patrol Group (SPG, now rebranded as the Territorial Support Group) of the institutionally racist and institutionally corrupt British Metropolitan police to beat down an antiracist demonstration in Southall, and, in so doing, support the right of the genuinely fascist thugs of the National Front to hold an 'election rally' in that town, with its large Indian population, during the general election of 1979.

The SPG, itself thoroughly imbued with racist ideology, performed its role with such enthusiastic fervour that its uniformed thugs beat to death a young New Zealand-born antiracist campaigner and teacher, Blair Peach, who is remembered as a martyr of the antiracist struggle by the people of Southall to this day.†

We could talk of Gordon Brown's, Clement Attlee's or indeed Ramsay MacDonald's misty-eyed nostalgia for the brutality and racist colonial apartheid that was the exploitative police regime of the British empire. Or, indeed, the racist imperialist wars waged by the Labour party against Iraq and Afghanistan – but enough. All this twentieth-century history recited by the *BRS* in general terms is airbrushed clean of any reference to the dirty anti-working class, racist and pro-imperialist servitude of the

* 'Virginity tests for immigrants "reflected dark age prejudices" of 1970s Britain' by Alan Travis, *The Guardian*, 8 May 2011.

† 'Blair Peach commemoration in Southall', *Lalkar*, May 1999.

Labour party and its serial administrations.

Surely, the *BRS* 2020 is a most carefully selective 'programme . . . based on the study, analysis and assessment of concrete realities, tendencies and trends' – carefully selected to sidestep the awkward question of the role of Labour party social democracy that the document sets out to paint as the *liberator* of the working class. This is not a case of evidence-based analysis, but of analysis-based selection (or avoidance) of 'evidence'. The true method of scientific and historical analysis is turned upside down.

Is it any wonder, then, that the conclusions of the *BRS* serve the practical activity of its adherents so ill?

Social democracy – 'limits'

Whichever parties are in office, the ruling capitalist class is always in power. This is as true in the case of Labour governments as of any others. Over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the limits of social democracy have become clear, demonstrating again and again that socialism remains the only real, fundamental alternative to capitalism.*

Hear, hear! But having paid lip-service to the Marxist principle that the Westminster bourgeois-democratic parliament is an institution of capitalist rule, and that any Labour administration is a government of the capitalists like any other, the matter is dropped, and nothing more is said of it, or of Labour's role, until the opposite position is then taken:

In pursuing its general strategy internationally and at home,

* *BRS*, p16.

it is clear that British state power remains integral to the interests of British monopoly capital. This same strategy was reflected in the programme for coalition government drawn up by the Tories and Liberal Democrats in 2010. The coalition was the preferred option of Britain's financial oligarchy after the election, as *Labour in government would have been more susceptible to popular and trade union pressure on important economic and social questions*, despite the pro-monopoly, pro-imperialist orientation of the Labour party leadership at that time. (My emphasis)*

Well, which is it? Either Labour is a party of imperialism or it is a workers' party 'susceptible to popular and trade union pressure'. In fact, Labour is very often *less* susceptible to such pressure than are the Tories, so mindful is it of accommodating the concerns of the imperialist class. Even John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn were keen to 'meet with and reassure key players in the city'.

In reality, Labour is a key player in controlling, subduing and diffusing working-class pressure on the imperialist class.

And further:

Preventing the election of a left-led Labour government was the political priority of Britain's ruling class in the period up to the 2019 general election. Labour's domestic manifesto for an extension of public ownership, trade union rights, collective bargaining and a significant redistribution of income and wealth threatened monopoly capital's material and ideological interests to an extent not seen since the early 1980s. Despite differences over Brexit, therefore, the ruling capitalist class united behind Boris Johnson to secure a Tory victory.

* BRS, p19.

There are a great many lessons to be learnt from the entryism of the left into the Labour party, under the shock leadership of Corbyn, which we have explored extensively elsewhere and will not repeat here. The conclusions to be drawn from that episode are *not* that Labour is 'susceptible to pressure' from the left, however, but the *reverse* – that it is entirely *immune* to such pressure.*

Even if led by a genuine socialist individual or group – and we are not of the opinion that Corbyn was such a figure – the entire structural apparatus of the Labour party is so dominated by the interests of an aristocracy of labour, tied hand and foot to British imperialism, that it will self-destruct rather than advance any 'reforms [that] go further and conflict not just with the immediate drive to profits but with the fundamental conditions of reproduction of capitalism'.

This was amply demonstrated by the activities of Chukka Umunna, MP and his creation of the 'Change UK' split from Corbyn's Labour, as well as by the leaked Labour report into 'antisemitism'.

The 'New' Labour government

The 1997-2010 New Labour governments failed to repeal most of these measures. But they did fulfil manifesto commitments to set up a Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly and to re-establish an elected authority for Greater London. Without charting a clear course for the reunification of Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement helped bring peace and a power-sharing assembly to the north.†

* Various authors, *The Rise and Fall of Project Corbyn*, CPGB-ML, 2020.

† *BRS*, p21.

New Labour introduced limited reforms to expand trade union rights but refused to repeal the vicious anti-union laws of the Thatcher-Major period.

The New Labour governments introduced repressive new laws to suppress the growing opposition to government policies. Particular groups of people (immigrants, benefit claimants, travellers, young people) were made the scapegoats for mass unemployment, rising crime, social unrest and other failures of government policy and of capitalism itself . . .

The powers of the police and security and immigration services were increased to unprecedented levels. Asylum seekers and refugees were blamed unfairly for government failures to invest fully in health, education and housing. Muslims were demonised as part of the so-called 'war on terror', which cynically used the barbaric 9/11 attacks as the pretext for curtailing civil liberties at home and bombing and invading other countries, thereby stimulating the spread of sectarian terrorism . . .

Like previous Labour governments, New Labour also embraced the use of military state power to promote monopoly capitalist interests abroad. It strengthened British imperialism's subservient alliance with US imperialism, participated in wars of aggression, supported repressive regimes in Colombia, Israel and the middle east, offered facilities to the US Star Wars programme and colluded in the illegal kidnapping, transportation and torture of detainees from around the world, including from Britain itself.*

Is this not Labour party anti-working-class and pro-imperialist policy – including racism – implemented on behalf of the ruling class, which Labour faithfully serves?

* *BRS*, p22.

The environment and capitalism

The urgency grows to lift people out of hunger, poverty, sickness and ignorance. Our planet's ecosystem must be rescued before it deteriorates beyond the point of no return. Even under wasteful and destructive capitalism, the productive forces exist that could, if planned and utilised to meet human need instead of maximising capitalist profit, ensure sufficient food, nutrition, healthcare and education for all.*

Indeed. But the productive forces are not ours. The masses have been disinherited. In Britain, twenty-five thousand land-owners – just 0.05 percent of the population – own more than half of the land area.† The pandemic has shown that 'we' in the capitalist world are unable to use our nation's ample resources (land, capital, labour-power, buildings, industries) to meet the urgent and pressing needs of our working population, even in a time of most dire emergency and crisis.

The urgent political question for workers, therefore – and all self-professed communists should surely be systematically and consciously grappling with this question – is how the working class is to 'win the battle of democracy'; to win political power and use it 'to wrest by degrees all capital from the bourgeoisie'.‡

The 'merits' of social democracy: the Keynesian consensus

Returning to the supposed merits of Labour, the *BRS* continues:

* *BRS*, p23.

† *WhoOwnsEngland.org*

‡ K Marx and F Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848.

In Britain, the post-1945 welfare state helped masses of people to escape destitution and avoidable ill health. Progressive taxation – based on people's ability to pay – has at times provided extra funds for public services and achieved some redistribution of wealth.*

This was the Keynesian consensus. It was a concession made by imperialism in the face of the positions won by the international communist movement, particularly the extension of the people's democracies beyond the territory of the USSR, owing to the victories of the Red armies of the Soviet Union and China, and the coming of socialist revolution to China, Korea, French southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), Indonesia, central and eastern Europe, and later Cuba, Grenada, etc. The anti-colonial movement, the real ally of the revolutionary proletariat, was at that time spreading like wildfire, with a prominent part played by the international communist movement.

The welfare state was not – most definitely *not* – a concession 'won by the Labour party'. That this is so is shown by the fact that with the collapse of the USSR that concession has been attacked and rolled back, and today British wealth is more concentrated, in fewer hands, and the nation more polarised than ever before.

Out of the opposition to social-democratic support for imperialist war came the splits and divisions that gave birth to the communist parties. [This is the entire attention devoted to World War One, the betrayal of workers by social democracy, and the split in the working class that it revealed most starkly.] In the second phase, after 1945, social-democratic governments administered, reformed and strengthened state-monopoly capitalism in return for abandoning the aim of so-

* *BRS*, p23.

cialism.*

This is how 'history' is written to gloss over the class character of the Labour party.

With 'bold communist vision for the future', the 2020 *BRS* reiterates its condemnation of the USSR's 'bureaucratic-command system of economic and political rule', ironically denouncing the increased role in a workers' state of trade unions:

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the trade unions became integrated into the apparatus of the state, eroding working-class and popular democracy [!]

And the CPB has the nerve to accuse the USSR of dogmatism, while stating that an increased role of workers' trade unions in governance of the nation's politics and economy 'erodes working-class and popular democracy'. Have its luminaries taken a leaf from the Tory party playbook here?

At times, and particularly in the late 1930s following the rise of fascism, severe violations of socialist democracy and law occurred in the fight against external threats and internal subversion. Large numbers of innocent people were persecuted, imprisoned and executed.†

New socialist states achieved the same in the war-torn countries of eastern Europe, where the Soviet model of society was promoted in both its positive and negative aspects.

But under pressure from the arms race launched by the US and Nato, the Soviet bureaucratic-command system was unable to utilise the full fruits of the STR beyond the military, space

* *BRS*, p24.

† *BRS*, p25.

and medical fields. From the mid-1970s, economic growth in the Soviet Union declined from previous levels, while continuing to outstrip that of western Europe until the mid-1980s; the planned economies of eastern Europe actually grew faster during the 1970s than those of west Germany, Britain, France and the US.

Nonetheless, problems of resource allocation, waste, incentive and productivity were not resolved. The ruling communist parties failed to counter the appeal of capitalist 'consumerism' materially and ideologically, as their own citizens made unfavourable comparisons that took no account of imperialism's superexploitation of the third world.*

Of course, no account is taken of the contribution of Khrushchev's triumphant revisionism and the introduction of capitalist norms of production that led to the degeneration and collapse of the USSR. Rather, the CPB's *BRS* recites the trite but entirely false claim that 'problems of resource allocation, waste, incentive and productivity were not resolved' by socialist economics – indicating the CPB's ideological capitulation to the idea that the market is the only way of allocating production rationally without such 'problems of resource allocation, waste, incentive and productivity'.

This is somewhat ironic given the fact that much of the *BRS* 'programme' is given over to reciting well-known facts about the global capitalist economy: its endemic poverty, unemployment, inequality, poor health, lack of drinking water and medicine for not hundreds of millions but billions of workers and small farmers in today's 'high-tech' imperialist world – a world in which the child mortality of fourteen million a year from malnutrition and treatable infections and diseases (diarrhoea and vomiting, malaria, TB) is accepted as 'normal' and where six

* *BRS*, p26.

multibillionaires (of whom one, Jeff Bezos, is now a *trillionaire*) own more between them than half the planet's population.

Is this, then, market efficiency in 'resource allocation, waste, incentive and productivity'? And what of the global economic depression that will wipe out all benefits of human civilisation for hundreds of millions more?

Still, our brave communists, having failed to get to grips with their own history of renegacy and collapse, or that of the international revisionist movement, go on to cite 'the weaknesses and failures of the Soviet model of socialism', claiming that it failed to solve the problem of women's discrimination, of mobilising the workers, etc. There is in this 'summary' a deliberate and conscious *conflation* of the heroic period of creation and building of Soviet socialism, with all its incredible economic, social, political and military achievements under the leadership of Lenin and Stalin, and the later period of vandalism and destruction under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev and those who came after him.

There is more than ample reason for this, if one considers that the CPB is but another daughter splinter party of this catastrophic sabotage of the working-class movement. What, one might ask, have our CPB 'communists' been doing for the last fifty years if they cannot answer the most basic, fundamental and urgent political and organisational questions of the working class? Oh, yes – campaigning for a Labour party 'anti-monopoly' social-democratic government.

One might as well campaign for the moon to be made out of blue cheese!

China and the market economy

Moving on to China (in the CPB's British election manifesto, it should be noted), the *BRS* states:

Determined not to experience counter-revolution and its consequences, China's communists have placed great emphasis on economic and social development [have not all socialist governments and societies?]. State power is used to combine economic planning and public ownership with private capital and market mechanisms.

We do not intend to get side-tracked into this glib 'summary' of China's history and urge serious students of socialism to obtain and study Harpal Brar's recent book on the topic.* It is enough to note for the present that the CPB has essentially cleft to the position of advocating market socialism, or economic capitalism with an enhanced role for planning and the state. Thus People's Vietnam is cited approvingly as

. . . pursuing a similar path based on planning, a mixed economy, market mechanisms and the leading role of the Communist party.

British exceptionalism: the labour 'movement' and the left

But which forces in society can be mobilised to resist the policies of state-monopoly capitalism? Which can be won for far-reaching change and socialism? The question is left hanging over pages of rambling and superfluous justification of the fact that classes exist in Britain (although their nature and relations are not analysed), and a plea that trade unions should campaign for the rights of workers and for equality (but silence on the question of why so few in fact do so).

* H Brar, *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: Marketisation of the Chinese Economy*, 2020.

Excerpts from this generally anodyne and meandering programme are clearly set out to embellish the erroneous idea that British workers should get behind the Labour party as being the chief electoral force 'for the working class'.

Each country must find its own path to socialism, applying general principles to specific national conditions in their international context. Each will develop its own model of socialism in tune with the culture and aspirations of its people . . .

In Britain and its constituent nations, taking the road to socialism can only be done successfully by taking those differing national conditions fully into account.*

In Britain, the electoral system is mostly rigged against small, new or left-wing parties, while elected parliaments can be marginalised or dissolved . . .

The essence of popular sovereignty, on the other hand, is that the democratic will of the people should prevail over the vested interests of a powerful minority and their state apparatus.†

Through the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and together with socialist organisations, trade unions established the Labour party at the beginning of the twentieth century, not only to represent working-class interests in Parliament but to strive for a socialist society.‡

This is actually not the case. The Labour party was *explicitly* set up by the trade unions as an ideological *continuation* of the prevailing Liberal-Labour politics, as a party to 'represent the

* BRS, p27.

† BRS, p31.

‡ BRS, p36.

interests of the working class in parliament', and it explicitly *rejected* the fight for socialism, or revolutionary action, against the will of a significant minority of its organising body. The Social Democratic Federation (SDF), for example, left the organisation over the issue (arguably at that time inadvisedly, in that its departure helped to cement labour-aristocratic control over the organisation).*

The most politically advanced elements of the working class founded the Communist party in 1920 to fight not only for reform, but for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and for socialism.

That is undoubtedly true, but that Communist party was the CPGB, under the influence of the Third International – not the CPB, which, as noted above, was a much-diminished organisation founded in 1988 as one of the groups that emerged from the dissolution of the revisionist postwar CPGB.

The CPB preserved itself in party form, but did not overcome the political mistakes that had led to the inexorable decline of the old CPGB before it formally dissolved itself in 1991. We understand why the CPB seeks to gloss over that inglorious episode in its history, but we cannot condone what amounts not only to fraudulence, but more importantly to a failure to come to terms with the root causes of the collapse of the USSR and of the entire revisionist project.

'Honesty is the sign of strength in politics, hypocrisy the sign of weakness,' in the apt words of Vladimir Lenin.

Almost since its formation, the Labour party has been the mass party of the organised working class. It continues to enjoy the electoral support of large sections of workers. But its politics and ideology have been those of social democracy, seeking to manage and reform capitalism in response to the immediate

* Harpal Brar, *The 1926 British General Strike*, 2009.

temporary interests of the labour movement, instead of abolishing it in the fundamental interests of the working class and humanity. [This, then, is not socialism, after all, but a bourgeois Labour party.]

The Labour party has never fundamentally challenged the ruling class. At best, it has only reflected and represented the 'trade union consciousness' of the working class in political life. The reformist outlook that dominates Labour confines the party to an exclusively parliamentary role within the capitalist system. It sees its campaigning work almost entirely in terms of participation in elections and carries out little or no socialist education.

Yet the Labour party in Britain is different from social-democratic parties in other countries in one crucial respect. It was formed as a federal party with mass trade union affiliations.*

But the Labour party is not *now* a federal party; it long since became a monolithic structure that eschews all cooperation with 'communists' and expels them if they are discovered in its ranks. But even when it *was* a federal party, politically it was formed and dominated by an upper, privileged section of the working class – by the aristocracy of labour.

The composition of that privileged section has changed over time, but the leading officials of big unions (with a few exceptions such as Arthur Scargill and Bob Crow), pocketing huge salaries and crucially *failing* to pursue the interests of their members *even in the sphere of industrial struggle*, have continued to be an important part of that section of 'bourgeoisified' workers – people who have not radicalised the Labour party but rather have been one of the mainstays of conservative influence upon it.

* BRS, p36.

The CPB – claiming to be the inheritor of the CPGB (it is not, other than having appropriated Marx House, and a handful of remaining assets won for the original party by loyal working-class former members) – would do well to reflect upon the activity, history and meaning of the communist-led trade union Minority Movement, which was necessary precisely to *circumvent and overcome* the reactionary leadership of the general council of the TUC. It would do well to contemplate the history of the 1926 general strike,^{*} or, more recently, of the great miners' strike of 1984/5.[†]

Instead, the programme moves on to assert that

The unique structure and composition of the Labour party has helped ensure the continuation of a significant socialist trend within it.

Really? Where and what is that trend?

These socialists have at times won major advances in the battle of ideas within and beyond the party. They have supported policies for democratic public ownership, progressive taxation, capital controls, trade union rights and nuclear disarmament that challenge monopoly capital in the interests of working people.

Who has supported this agenda – an agenda which is very far from 'challenging the ability of capital to reproduce itself' – in Labour? Corbyn? And what came of his loyalty to those ideas when he ascended to leadership? All were jettisoned in the interest of office – and still the Labour party *itself sabotaged* its own election campaign in 2017 and *again in 2019*, in full

* 'The British general strike' by G Cremer, *Proletarian*, 2006; H Brar, *The 1926 British General Strike*, 2009.

† 'Lessons of the great miners' strike of 1984-85', *Lalkar*, September 2004.

coordination with the entire capitalist state apparatus, rather than risk this 'fringe lunatic' from gaining administrative power over the capitalist state machine, which he would anyway have wielded in a quite conventional way, as did all previous Labour administrations.

Where was the 'mass struggle for democracy' in the face of this sabotage? Nowhere! All amounted simply to begging – unsuccessfully, given Corbyn's weak leadership and the anti-worker Labour party vehicle that he 'led' in form, at best.

But the Labour party left is not a cohesive and united force.

No, it is a fiction, destined to waste the time and energy of any worker who is misled into engaging with it, whether by Labour party activists, by the various shades of Trotskyites, or indeed by the CPB revisionists with their misnamed *Britain's Road to Socialism* programme.

The 2020 *BRS* makes a great deal of the 'transformation' of the Labour party apparatus under the leadership of Tony Blair, who in reality cut the 'Labour' cloth to suit the modern needs of imperialism, just as all previous leaders had done. But the era was that of post-Soviet collapse and the garb of the party's 'socialist' clause IV could safely be jettisoned.* It had anyway always been studiously ignored.

Democracy in Labour was curtailed by Blair, says the CPB

To make sure of the Labour party's acquiescence in its own political and ideological transformation from the mid-1990s, a series of measures were adopted by agreement with mis-

* *BRS*, p36.

guided trade union leaders to dismantle democratic processes within the party. The resulting centralisation challenged the Labour party's federal character, concentrating power in the hands of a small clique at the top. The rights and participation of affiliated organisations were severely restricted at every level of the party.

Yet there was nothing fundamentally new in this. The very structure of the parliamentary Labour party (PLP) has, since its inception as a separate and upper organisational structure, guaranteed the frustration of Labour party democracy, together with the block votes of the trade union affiliates and the structure of the party's national executive committee (NEC).

Subsequently, however, the party's right wing miscalculated when opening the Labour leadership ballot to all individual members and affiliated and registered supporters, with the intention of weakening the collective voice of the trade unions. No account was taken of the potential for recruitment from within the anti-austerity and antiwar mass campaigns, in which the Communist party and the daily socialist Morning Star newspaper have played a significant part. The combined forces of the extra-parliamentary mass movements, the trade unions and the Labour left then propelled left MP Jeremy Corbyn to victory in the 2015 and 2016 party leadership ballots.*

Can you believe it, dear reader? The CPB not only claims responsibility for Corbyn's ascent in the Labour party, it continues to see this as some sort of 'victory' and as a credit to its entire strategy of blindly and subserviently tolling the bell for Labour party social democracy. It would be funny if it were not so deeply tragic!

* *BRS*, p37.

And what of Sir Keir Starmer and the firm control of the Blairites within Labour?

Following Labour's 2019 general election defeat and Corbyn's resignation, it remains to be determined whether the left trend in the party can – with enough trade union support – win the struggle not only for leadership, but also for policies that challenge British state-monopoly capitalism and imperialism.*

It remains to be seen . . . whether tomorrow the sun will indeed rise again in the east, traverse the heavens and sink below the horizon in the west! But all experience strongly suggests that it will. So with Labour, one might very well cast about for some sign of hope, that one prop or another of the social-democratic elite, one body or another of the bourgeois aristocracy of Labour – the leading trade unions, the PLP, the Labour party branches – might transform themselves into the saviours that will 'respond to mass pressure' and champion the fight for socialism.

All experience, however, suggests that each of these bodies, and most of all the Labour party as a whole, will continue faithfully to represent and champion the interests of the monopoly-capitalist billionaire class, irrespective of the ragged and hopeless bands of entryist Trotskyites and revisionist 'communists' who cling to its coat-tails and imagine that their careerism will somehow (but how?!) sweep the workers to victory and a very British socialist revolution!

The election showed that left leadership alone may not be enough to win elections [!]; the development of mass struggle and educated class-consciousness are also fundamentally possible. This will require a major shift to the left in ward and

* *BRS*, p37.

constituency party organisations as well as in the parliamentary Labour party, where pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist views are strongly entrenched.

All is contingent upon winning the Labour party to socialism – the constituency parties and the PLP, no less! Why not the central party apparatus and the British state? Why not win the police and army leadership to revolution? Surely the Tory party can be won? Or the imperialist ruling billionaire class itself?

Are these not all reasonable strategies to ‘foment mass democracy and come to real socialism’, which will anyway be a ‘mixed market economy’ with some small role for state planning. Perhaps like the pandemic response of chancellor Rishi Sunak, which has certainly involved a huge amount of state spending – far in excess of the planned Corbyn budget, in fact! Again and again:

The working class and peoples of Britain need a mass political party, based on the labour movement [this is always the favoured euphemism used by our CPB comrades, who have forgotten that their heads are more than convenient places to rest their hats and could also be used for rational thought, when they wish to disguise their conflation of the working class with the Labour party, of which they have become the financial and ideological serfs], that can win general elections, form a government and implement substantial reforms in their interests.*

Repetition is the key to learning, they say, and Labour is the only realistic option, don’t you see? Was not Tony Blair right when he noted that clause IV could happily be abolished without decreasing support from ‘the labour left’ – as they have

* *BRS*, p37.

'nowhere else to go'!? The political dogmatism of the revisionist CPB knows no bounds, and reading this 2020 version of *Britain's Road to Socialism* reminds one of the saying: 'To the mouse, no beast is stronger than the cat'!

The CPB worthies have been gazing with a mix of admiration and foreboding upon the posterior of the Labour party 'social imperialists' for so long, that no reading of Marx or Lenin, and certainly not Stalin or Mao, could persuade them otherwise than that 'in the special case of Britain' social democracy is the only 'realistic' road to socialism! All else is (don't laugh!) 'ultra-leftism'.

Labour has been a dominant force in the working-class movement for too long. But like all phenomena under heaven, it had its inception, its ascendancy, and now we are assuredly witnessing its decline. Our job, to ease the suffering of workers of all countries, must be to *hasten its demise*, and the imperialist socioeconomic system of which it is a part.

Why does the CPB persist in its unrequited love for Labour?

No explicit mention is made in the 2020 *BRS* of Lenin's advice that British communists should seek affiliation to Labour (he in fact did *not* give that advice, as outlined above), but it is the private justification given out personally by word of mouth by the CPB's members.

For as long as many of the biggest trade unions are affiliated to the Labour party, *the potential exists* to wage a broad-based fight *to secure the party for the labour movement and left-wing policies*. Certainly, this is the most direct route to ensuring the continued existence of a mass party of labour in Britain and is a goal that *every communist and non-sectarian socialist*

should support. (My emphasis)

Is there a crime that Labour could commit that would lead the CPB to re-evaluate its unrequited love for Labour? Apparently not. For its leaders would never wish to sink so low as to become 'sectarian socialists' – a term they would have had to apply to the founders of their avowed political trend, notably Marx and Engels, and most assuredly Lenin.

They now generally disavow other great Marxist-Leninist leaders, so we will not even bring them into the equation. It seems that Lenin's excoriating critique of social democracy, which runs as a theme throughout tens of volumes of his writings, is of far less value to the CPB in making their assessment of the Labour party as a force for socialism than is the financial relationship that exists between this dwindling band of social-democratic 'communists' and the trade unions that support the *Morning Star* and provide wages for the party's 'leading' activists.

The fact is that the few paid organisers that the CPB has, and its ideological output, is all supported by mechanisms that support the aristocracy of labour; that the way to finding a cosy place in the sun, sheltering from the really intense and demanding class struggle that is the only way to achieve socialism, is to adopt parliamentary cretinism and Labour social democracy. This is all justified by and falls within the acceptable bounds of bourgeois politics.

No wonder that the real representatives of capital feel so confident as to lampoon our British Trotskyites and revisionists as the 'loony left'! No wonder that the revisionists of the CPB find it so easy to work with the Trotskyites in Stop the War, along with the left wing of Labour social democracy, but take every opportunity to frustrate the rise of any really revolutionary split with social democracy, whether that was the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) of Arthur Scargill or the Workers party led by George Galloway and Joti Brar.

BRITAIN'S ROAD TO SOCIALISM?

The Communist party and the Morning Star have an important contribution to make to the struggle within the labour movement.

Part of the Communist party's role is to provide a vision of socialism and a practical strategy for achieving it. Communists therefore seek to work with left trends that have a real, sustained base in the labour movement, urging them to unite around policies and in actions which raise the combativeness, confidence and political consciousness of the working class. This would lay the basis for their convergence in a mass party of labour, one federally organised to permit the affiliation of socialist and communist parties and committed to the fight for socialism.

The CPB will only work with (or more accurately, for) the Labour party. That is all. That is the strategy. That is it.

And this despite the entire history of Labour's *rejection* of the affiliation of other groups, parties and organisations felt to have a communist bearing, influence or membership, including the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, the Anti-Imperialist League, the International Brigades, the Soviet Friendship Society, China solidarity groups, the militant trade union Minority Movement (accounting for some ten percent of organised trade unionism in the 1920s and 30s), and of course the original CPGB, which initially did contest seats on the basis of an electoral pact with Labour, producing Britain's greatest parliamentary spokesmen of the working class: Shapurji Saklatvala (Comrade Sak), Phil Piratin and Willie Gallacher.

The point to note is that the Labour party *learnt its lesson*: in the strict anticommunist fight it waged, it was prepared to sabotage its own electoral fortunes and the interests of the working class in order ruthlessly to pursue the class struggle on behalf of the employing British imperialist class. When attempted affiliation to Labour became the CPGB's policy, its attempts

were repeatedly rebuffed – and this is not a decision that is subject to negotiation, even were the CPB an organisation with the kind of working-class support that the CPGB could muster in 1920, which it most assuredly is not.

It is the communists of the CPB who have given up their communism in putting this line forward, fully one century after it was *comprehensively defeated in practice*. The Labour party has not changed its spots. Yet throughout every twist and turn of modern history (and keeping all the brilliant theoretical works of Marxism safely locked up in the Marx Memorial Library and strictly isolated from the deliberations of the policy committee of their central committee) the gurus of the CPB keep banging their heads against the same unfeeling Labour party brick wall.

Nationalism and separatism

Socialist and progressive forces and left parliamentary and assembly representatives in the Greens, Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National party (SNP) and other organisations can also play an important part in the battles for reforms, peace and fundamental social change.*

Bourgeois nationalists, capitalists, separatists, imperialist lackeys and greenwashers of the exploiters of the working class ('Tories on bikes', as an anarchist leaflet aptly characterised them): all are welcome in the 'non-sectarian socialist' camp of the CPB. Anyone, in fact, other than militant class-conscious working-class fighters.

It is precisely the failures of the Labour party over a century that have led broad swathes of the working class to reject the party in the former heartlands of Labourism – and, indeed, of

* BRS, p38.

communism – in Scotland and Wales, and now in the 'red wall' in the north and midlands of England, and it is the persistence of the revisionist communists' support for the Labour party that is also dragging them down.

Identity politics

The actual oppression of women is maintained by the *ideology* of gender, with its social expectations and norms of masculinity and femininity which are reproduced through state institutions, education, the media and popular culture. These limit the potential of women and men and are a root cause of violence and abuse against women, children, lesbians, gays and transgender people. (My emphasis)*

Gender, of course, is not an ideological construct, 'manufactured' 'through state institutions, education, the media and popular culture', but a *material* fact, reflected in all spheres of social activity and life. Humanity is divided into men and women. 'Norms of masculinity and femininity' may change with society, but masculine (male, men) and feminine (female, women) have and will continue to exist in all societies. Therefore, addressing the *concept or ideology* of sex (gender) as the 'root cause' of a negative social phenomenon that itself needs to be addressed, indeed 'eradicated', is entirely erroneous.

We will not address further the poison of identity politics that has seeped into the CPB's 'programme', but simply refer comrades of the CPB to Engels' truly revolutionary work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.[†] If they can't understand its relation to the topic at hand, we can further

* BRS, p39.

† F Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1884.

recommend Joti Brar's excellent seminar on Proletarian TV,* or they may like to pick up the CPGB-ML pamphlet on the topic of identity politics.†

We note in passing a strange rearguard action in the next few lines of the pamphlet, in which the CPB appears to acknowledge its surrender on this point:

Analysis of structural inequality is being replaced by some with reactionary identity politics which emphasise the individual over collective experience [!]

Presumably, having capitulated on so many key points of Marxism (imperialism, the state, social democracy, the Soviet Union, economics of the market, the national question, etc), the comrades of the 'old guard', tired and beleaguered as they must be, have not really the stomach for the fight against just one more pernicious bourgeois ideological trend that is torpedoing their party and rendering it totally unseaworthy.

Organising among national minorities in Britain

Organisation among the black and minority ethnic communities, exemplified by the Indian Workers Association (GB) and the Bangladeshi Workers Council (UK), provides an important basis for challenging the prejudice and discrimination that emanate from empire, colonialism and imperialism. Antiracist and anti-fascist campaigning by a range of other organisations also plays an important role.

However, much more needs to be done to mobilise black, mi-

* 'The origin and development of class society and the state', presentation by J Brar, *TheCommunists.org*, July 2013.

† Various authors, *Identity Politics and the Transgender Trend*, CPGB-ML, 2019.

nority ethnic and other working-class communities, together with the labour movement at every level. This is essential if government policies are to be changed and racist and fascist organisations halted in their tracks.*

These two paragraphs are interesting. As this article is destined to appear in *Lalkar*, the journal founded by the Indian Workers Association (GB), and edited for forty years by Harpal Brar, one of its leading members and a British worker of Indian origin, we will note in passing that the major role in fighting racism and separatism in the British working class should not and cannot fall to individual groups based upon their victimisation. Racism is not the problem of 'blacks' alone. Rather, this must be part of the British working class's struggle *for unity*, to free itself from division in order to become an effective fighting force for meaningful social and political change.

This was indeed the position of the Indian Workers Association, and of the Indian Workers Front, both led by Comrades Jagmohan Joshi, Teja Singh Sahota, Hardev Dhillon, Avtar Jouhl and Harpal Brar, among others. That they maintained a fierce struggle against the concept of black separatism, characterising it as a form of 'bourgeois nationalism', a stance demanding that the wider working-class movement take up the antiracist struggle in earnest, but also fighting against the separatism and isolationism of 'black nationalism', can be seen by the writings of *Lalkar* itself, a paper that served a real mass organisation of the Indian working class, capable of calling demonstrations attended by tens of thousands. These writings are brought together in Harpal Brar's excellent book on the topic.†

Suffice to say, the 'IWA' to which the CPB belatedly refers (at least twenty years after the IWA ceased to be a leading force in

* *BRS*, p39.

† H Brar, *Bourgeois Nationalism or Proletarian Internationalism?*, 1998.

British working-class politics) is a shadow of that organisation, and of marginal significance.

A word for all, but a programme for none

The *BRS* goes on to give an approving pat on the head to many sections of the working class, and mentions campaigns in which the CPB is 'involved'. Young people, students, teachers, trade unions, old people, pensioners, peace campaigners, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Stop the War, environmentalists, the nationalist movements in Scotland, Wales and Cornwall . . .

The SNP and Plaid Cymru remain committed to state-monopoly capitalism's European Union project, which is itself wedded to the dominant principles and outlook of neoliberalism. Nonetheless, these elements can be won to the fight for measures which favour the working class and challenge at least some of the interests of British imperialism.

Every shade of renegade and neoliberal is welcome in the CPB's 'broad anti-monopoly movement', it seems! The same might very well be said of the Green party, the Liberal party, and the Tory party. Why are these parties, too, not fertile ground for targeting 'elements [that] can be won to the fight for measures which favour the working class and challenge at least some of the interests of British imperialism'?

In Britain and its constituent nations, there is a long tradition of international solidarity.

And yet, in this time of reaction, when imperialism is immersed in its most profound crisis and indeed worldwide economic depression, neoliberalism really is trouncing the working

conditions of the majority of the working class.

Particularly hard hit are the poorest and most economically deprived workers. And at such a time, each section of the British working class is being invited to desert the concept of a broad national (British working-class) fight against capitalism, instead seeking to head to their own 'national' tent – even if a totally spurious national tent has to be erected for the purpose of beating this hopeless retreat (Cornish, Welsh, Scottish, Manx . . . why not Yorkshire, Lancashire, Liverpool, Manchester, Southall . . . ?)

British workers have lost faith in the British working-class movement *because it is dominated everywhere by Labour party social democracy*, which has proven to be an abject servant of neoliberalism – as typified by its Brexit stance and betrayal. That is the real meaning of the failed Corbyn project, if the redrafters of the CPB's *BRS* would just look up from their exercise and glance out of the windows of Marx House into the environs of Clerkenwell and beyond.

Sitting so near the centre of finance capital, and surrounded by the works of Marx, it is a shame that they have ventured to study and apprehend neither.

The attempt to preserve the key elements of a programme that has failed so comprehensively, while making passing references to all the elements of that abject failure, is like wishing mourners at a funeral 'Many happy returns of the day'! One cannot help but feel that the poor souls of the CPB 'leadership' cannot see the wood for the trees, or perhaps, if they can, that they are dimly aware that to change their line would mean to threaten the material basis of the organisation itself, resting as it does upon the few well-paid union jobs of its remaining organisers on the one hand, and crumbs thrown to them by the Labour-affiliated unions on the other.

The days when the CPGB was a vibrant leader of the working class, deriving its strength from the vitality of the British work-

ers in struggle, is a faded memory. The CPB was never such a party.

Today, there are active movements in solidarity with peoples facing imperialist-backed subversion, foreign occupation or state repression. Such campaigns have won wide support among the trades unions, thereby enhancing solidarity and developing greater understanding of the nature of imperialism.

Working-class people make up a substantial proportion – in most cases the vast majority – of the members and supporters of all these movements.*

The CPB has lost sight even of a class analysis of Britain, and what constitutes the economic basis of class. Who are the key elements of the working class who can and should be targeted by a really militant party of the working class? The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Stop the War, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Extinction Rebellion? We can only refer them to the excellent CPGB-ML pamphlet on this topic.[†]

The Communist party and revolutionary leadership

The aim of the Communist party is to replace capitalism with socialism, as the prelude to achieving a fully communist society.

Founded in Britain in 1920 as a party of a new type [again we must note that the CPB is not the CPGB of 1920, and should in reality be ashamed to make this false assertion. The CPB is a fraction of a splinter of the original CPGB, and in its make-up

* *BRS*, p42.

† E Rule, *A Class Analysis of Britain at the start of the Twenty-First Century*, CPGB-ML, 2017.

and vitality, in its size, scope and relevance, is as far removed from the prewar CPGB as the earth is from the heavens], the Communist party bases itself on the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin about the class character of capitalist society, the exploitation of labour-power, the role of the state, the development of imperialism and the need for a revolutionary party to make sure that the working class and its allies take political power and use it to overthrow capitalism and its state.*

Would that this were so! Lenin's analysis of imperialism went so far as to note the reason for the desertion of social democracy: ie, the fact that a split has emerged in the working-class movement of the richest imperialist nations; that there is a real privileged section of the working class, an 'aristocracy of labour'; that the bourgeoisie in each imperialist nation has secured a 'bourgeois labour party' to conduct its influence to the workers.

Lenin emphasised that social democracy proved its renegacy and capitulation during World War One, when opportunism became consummated, became 'a man'; became fully-fledged social-chauvinism and social-imperialism, calling for support of war credits and defence of the fatherland, becoming an aggressive recruiter, supporter and agent of the mass slaughter of that interimperialist war.†

Since that day, social democracy (the Labour party in Britain) has been an agent of imperialism. These are the teachings of Lenin. Let us see how the CPB follows Lenin's teachings.

The Communist party's class basis, historical experience and Marxist-Leninist outlook also distinguish it from many Trotskyist, Maoist or anarchist groups. These are usually no-

* *BRS*, p43.

† Various authors, *World War One: An Interimperialist War to Redivide the World*, CPGB-ML, 2015.

table for their 'ultra-left' slogans and adventurist tactics, combined with a sectarian approach that puts the interests of their own organisation above those of the labour movement.

The CPB, of course, uses 'Labour movement' here as a synonym for the Labour party, thus hollowing out the high-sounding phrases and bringing them into practical play as justification for abjectly kowtowing before the Labour party social democrats, who in turn ridicule or ignore them.

But this does not make the Communist party immune from criticism and mistakes. Indeed, the party had to be re-established in 1988 after revisionist and anti-democratic trends, especially in the leadership, threatened to destroy it.

In fact, the eurocommunist trend, as the consummation of revisionism, did destroy the CPGB. The few splinters that for a time maintained some sort of independent life and political existence – of which the 1988 CPB is but one – hobbled on for a time, but have been so saturated with the ills of revisionism and opportunism that every single splinter group succumbed to the malady.

The proof of this runs like the letters in a stick of Brighton rock throughout the defunct programme of the *BRS*, which has taken the main streams of Khrushchevite revisionism and embodied them at the heart of the revisionist CPB's practice. Namely:

1. Revisionist history devaluing the revolutionary experience of the USSR.
2. Failure to understand the role of Khrushchevism in the demise of the USSR, so confusing the victories and defeats of Soviet socialism in a hopeless jumble.
3. Abandoning Marx's teachings on the economics of socialism and capitulation to the bourgeois economics of the free market.

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4. Revision of Lenin's thesis of imperialism, in particular eradicating his observations on the split in the working-class movement.

5. British exceptionalism: whereas every other nation needs to undergo a revolutionary process, Britain does not, and can vote out its ruling class by supporting some kind of left-Labour entryism.

6. Excusing the Labour party's imperialist history, economics and politics on that basis – indeed, overlooking the entire working-class history of Britain!

7. Equating the working class with the labour aristocracy, and therefore failing to conduct a serious class analysis in Britain.

8. Succumbing to, rather than combatting, bourgeois nationalism; in so doing abandoning a genuine standpoint of proletarian internationalism.

9. Abandoning the link with the lowest and deepest sections of the working class in favour of the link with social democracy (in particular with the Labour party and trade union leaderships).

10. Embracing identity politics and 'intersectional theory'.

The CPB works hand in glove with counter-revolutionary Trotskyites

And all of this in the belief, hope, perhaps prayer, that

Within the Labour party and some far-left parties there are many socialists who make a vital contribution to the working-class and progressive movements, and with whom the Communist party works closely on the basis of common aims

and policies.*

This is an allusion to the fact that in addition to the Labour party, and on the basis of its capitulation to Labour social democracy as the core tenet of its programme and practice, the 'non-sectarian' CPB has also made common cause with the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and its daughter split Counterfire (Lindsay German and John Rees), with all the pernicious influence of the Trotskyite petty-bourgeois brand of 'left' social democracy that these embody (eg, the ultra-left criticism of the Libyan leadership for not fitting their prescribed political dogmas that might qualify for its support during the rapacious and genocidal Nato bombardment, plunder, robbery and division of that formerly proud African sovereign state).

Stop the War, under the direction of the CPB and Counterfire, it will be remembered, *staged anti-Libyan demonstrations outside the Libyan embassy*, even as the Nato bombers were preparing their payloads of death for the Libyan people, and Nato's wahhabist rats were lynching and ethnically cleansing the black population of Tawergha, making way for the reintroduction of chattel slavery in the newly 'liberated' territories.

In order to play its vital role in every stage of the revolutionary process, the Communist party [CPB revisionists] constantly seeks to strengthen its organisation and improve its membership in both quantity and quality, especially through the systematic study and application of the basic principles of dialectical and historical materialism, the philosophy of Marxism.

This does not preclude affiliation to the Labour party or other bodies on a genuinely federal basis, where communists retain their separate organisation and the capacity to act independently.

* BRS, p43.

What a sorry contradiction – and not a dialectical one! For dialectics requires, above all, detailed study and analysis of the subject under consideration. The CPB instead glosses over the real history both of Labour since its inception, and of the record of attempted affiliation of the old CPGB to the Labour party in the 1920s and 30s. The programme's authors do not even pause to examine the methods used to push out 'left infiltrators' and 'entryists', whether of the *Militant* Trotskyite tendency, the Socialist party or a myriad of others who flocked to Corbyn's banner so ineffectually in 2015-19.

No, this reference to 'dialectical' processes, to the 'quantity and quality' of their membership, to 'historical materialism' is just so much eyewash. A brief genuflection toward the icon, before getting on with the dirty business of class-collaboration and servitude to the Labour party social democrats.

Alternative economic and political strategy

This struggle against the policies of British state-monopoly capitalism can open the road to socialism, although any strategy for such fundamental change must be able to outline the distinct stages of revolutionary transformation. This in turn raises the question of how a popular, democratic anti-monopoly alliance would seek political power, including the role of elections and governments.*

The Communist party does not advocate separation, because it would fracture working-class and progressive unity in the face of a largely united ruling capitalist class [but it seeks to work with, please and praise the separatist parties! One can-

* *BRS*, p45.

not run with the fox and hunt with the hounds] . . .

The 'fight on three fronts' (economic, political and ideological/cultural)

All this leads, says the *BRS*, to its conclusion: the need to fight on three fronts (just three?)

1. The economic front for pay and conditions (trade union struggle).

2. 'Politically, the labour and progressive movements must have their own organisations to fight for policies and reforms, including in the electoral arena' – the Labour party (SNP, Plaid . . .)

3. 'On the ideological front, the left and the labour and progressive movements [Labour party] have to engage consistently, creatively and rigorously in the battle of ideas against those of the ruling class.

A mass understanding must be developed that democracy is not an institution but a process of emancipation. [A more abstract slogan, confusing the question of democracy, and of class interest, class rule and class struggle, would be hard to formulate.]

On all three fronts, the *Morning Star* as the daily paper of the labour movement and the left, with its editorial policy based on Britain's Road to Socialism, plays an indispensable role in informing, educating and helping to mobilise the forces for progress and revolution. As such, it needs and deserves the support of all socialists, communists and progressives, so that it can further strengthen the working-class movement and its allies in the battles ahead.

The *Morning Star*, not formally the paper of the CPB, but now an independent publication closely associated with it, and dependent on the funding of the trade union movement, is least of all able to break with the Labour party, being absolutely dependent on the Labour-dominated trade unions for its funding stream and for sales of its unpopular product, without which the paper would cease to exist.

It is not only eclectic and faddish, but tends towards plain liberalism, is often fiercely anti-Soviet and in fact highly sectarian – its guiding principle being loyalty to Labour social democracy above all else.

In this regard, it is true that the *Morning Star* follows the 'editorial policy of the *BRS*', and overall the *BRS* has so formulated its 'fight on three fronts' as to delegate the trade union struggle to the trade unions, the political struggle to the Labour party, and the 'ideological struggle' to the *Morning Star*, leaving its dwindling and inactive membership to claim they have fulfilled the behests of the programme without even venturing out of their front doors.

The 'left-wing' programme

Thus based upon this rambling, eclectic, revisionist, and most undialectical political 'preamble', we arrive at the 'left-wing programme' (LWP), which we are told we must 'popularise everywhere', but particularly in the Labour party, which will thus be 'pressured' to enact the LWP, once we have voted it into power.

The LWP, we are assured,

While showing how policies in different spheres can reinforce one another . . . lays the basis for even more advanced policies from a left-wing government at a later stage in the revolutionary process.

Building a productive, sustainable economy

[The LWP will] *end the City of London's financial domination of Britain's economy* and central government fiscal, financial and economic policies. Such a programme should aim to rebalance the economy, strengthen productive industry, develop hi-tech manufacturing, invest more in our public services, eliminate gross inequality, assist third-world development and help safeguard our planet's ecosystem.

[The LWP will bring us] *full employment and controls imposed on the export of capital*.

[The LWP will induce] *major private companies* [to] pursue investment, employment, pensions and other policies that serve the interests of workers, the economy and society.

[The LWP will bring] *democratic public ownership of the financial sector, gas, electricity, water, oil, pharmaceuticals, railways, buses, road haulage and air travel*".

[The LWP will bring] an integrated transport system, taking measures to make more journeys either unnecessary or less noxious [which] would curb greenhouse gas emissions.

[The LWP will] invest massively in public services and end all forms of privatisation. [This] could include the raising of funds through *public-sector bonds*, financed through *economic growth and higher tax revenues*.

[The LWP, by] offering financial and tax incentives and *directing private-sector investment* would stimulate regional economic development.

[The LWP will bring] a shorter working week and standard working life, with no loss of pay. All young people should be

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guaranteed fully-paid employment, good-quality training or apprenticeship. *Mass redundancies would be outlawed* in viable enterprises, while strategic enterprises threatened by closure are taken into democratic public ownership.

[The LWP will stop] *hostile buy-outs based on debt and asset-stripping*.

[The LWP will expand] sustainable agricultural production with adequate state support for investment and environmentally beneficial improvement, ending subsidies to big landowners and agribusiness, while *supporting small and tenant farmers* [where are these small and tenant farmers to be found in Britain?], including incentives for cooperative initiatives.

[Under the LWP,] *landed estates, luxury tourist establishments and 'second' homes must be brought under the democratic control* [not ownership, mind you, but control] of local communities. No longer will large landowners, property developers and big business be permitted to impose unwanted development against the wishes of local people. [But rents, taxes, extraction of surplus labour, restrictions, rights and privileges based upon private ownership, will remain?]

[The LWP will rule that] *fossil fuels must be left in the ground*, while installing solar panels in all large and new public and private-sector buildings and harnessing river estuary tidal power through lagoon and submarine turbine technology.

[The LWP will ensure] equal pay for work of equal value, and create training and retraining programmes for workers of all ages, especially women and ethnic minorities, thereby allowing them entry into more skilled, secure and better-paid jobs.

[The LWP will] build more council houses, especially in inner-city and rural communities, and . . . take over long-term empty properties for socially useful purposes. All social housing [will]

be brought back under local authority control.

[The LWP will] *decriminalise drug use* – but members of criminal gangs who continue their antisocial activities, regardless of the opportunities offered by progressive economic, social and cultural policies, would be subjected to the full force of the law. [This point may explain the entire formulation of the LWP!]

[Our] education system should be of the highest quality, adequately staffed and free to all. Improving nursery and child-care provision and making it available to all, funded by the public and private sectors, will not only benefit the children themselves.

[The LWP will ensure that] all schools are restored to *democratic local authority control*. Maintenance grants should be the right of all adults engaged in full-time study, with no place for tuition fees or graduate taxes. All immigrants to Britain must have opportunities to learn *English and the language of their new home area if Welsh or Scots Gaelic, free of charge*. (My emphasis throughout)

The LWP, in fact, is Magic. It will abolish capitalism – and preserve capitalism – simultaneously. The only thing it hasn't offered is to make workers more physically attractive!

And such a shopping list, that would confuse and confound every worker of every political stripe, aimed at transforming the economy, while leaving its capitalist essence untouched; having something for everyone, but without the uncomfortable necessity of winning state power, building a class alliance capable of winning 'the battle for democracy', mobilising the working class and educating it to the necessity of breaking the bourgeois state, the dictatorship of capital, or any such unpleasantness – in fact ends by offering nothing to anyone.

The only thing we can take away from this is that there is a lack of class analysis, economic analysis, political analysis,

or cultural understanding of Britain and British workers in this wish list – as in the entire document.

An independent foreign and defence policy

In the international arena, the aim of the LWP must be for Britain to pursue its own foreign policy, independent of the United States and the European Union.

Britain's monopoly capitalist class is *already* 'free' to pursue its own goals in accordance with its strength (financial and military), which is waning. Its alliances are built upon those interests. The question is: which class should pursue what goals?

British transnational corporations (TNCs) overseas would be regulated to ensure compliance with the highest labour and environmental standards. Cancelling third-world public debt to British financial TNCs would enable those countries to invest, develop and benefit from fair-trade relations with Britain and other developed economies. [The magic of 'regulation'! How are we to impose these regulations upon aggressive corporate capitalism, while leaving the latter intact?]

Britain should actively support the legitimate democratic and cultural rights of the *Kurdish people* and other minorities in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria.

Why single out the Kurdish people alone? We should support the democratic rights of *all* people, including those of the majority of the Iraqi, Iranian and Syrian people. That said, understanding that the solution to the national question is always specific and never general, the issue of Kurdish self-determination (like any other) must be viewed in its context and from the perspective of the interests of the workers of all nations in their

struggle against imperialism.

As such, it is impossible not to note that the question of the rights of Kurds in Iraq and Syria have been fraudulently taken up and used by Anglo-American and French imperialism in Iraq and Syria to justify aggressive and genocidal wars, destabilisation, and occupation, where the real goal was looting of the oil wealth of the middle east.

Left-wing 'anti-monopoly alliance'

Yet they all face a common enemy: British state-monopoly capitalism, which blocks advance on every front. Here lies the objective basis for uniting these forces in an anti-monopoly alliance, in favour of redeveloping Britain's productive economy and combating the anti-democratic use of state power against the interests of the great majority of people.

Experience of joint campaigning with the labour movement and the left, which can project wider political perspectives, will lead many more activists to a fuller understanding of the nature of capitalist society and why it must be replaced by socialism. *If these movements remain apart from the labour movement, not only will they lack its valuable support, the organised working class itself will lose the opportunity to gain valuable experience in its role as the leading force in society for progressive and revolutionary change.*

It is imperative, therefore, that the organised working class builds the widest possible alliance with all other movements fighting for progress, democratic rights, equality and justice. It will be vital to maintain the unity and respect the sovereignty of all the forces involved.

The left and the labour movement will need to transform an array of defensive battles against the capitalist monopolies,

right-wing governments and reactionary policies into a united offensive across a broad front, winning support for the LWP.*

The CPB and its *Britain's Road to Socialism* are enmeshed in an insoluble contradiction: the riddle of the enigma of justifying and prettifying a right-wing, pro-imperialist Labour party, which forms right-wing pro-imperialist administrations and pursues right-wing pro-imperialist policies, as being a vehicle for socialism in Britain.

The 'solution' is generally the word substitution of 'party' for 'movement', placed in conjunction with the word 'labour', along with the painting of a fanciful future in which there is a miraculous transformation of one into the other – without, apparently, any motive cause.

Stage one: 'Winning a left [Labour] government'

The first stage in the revolutionary process in Britain will be signified by a *substantial and sustained shift to the left in the labour movement*, growing support for key policies of the LWP among the working class and the population more widely, and the development of an anti-monopoly alliance of forces across a range of battles and campaigns . . .

Belief in the right of the people to decide who governs them is deeply rooted in England, Scotland and Wales. *The opening stage of Britain's socialist revolution will therefore have to culminate in the election of a left-wing government at Westminster, based on a socialist, Labour, communist and progressive majority at the polls.*[†]

* BRS, p58.

† BRS, p59.

This is just more parliamentary fetishism, parliamentary cretinism, and blind subservience to the Labour party.

Whether such governments are won *with or without electoral alliances or pacts* is less important than the need for socialists and communists to approach electoral strategy with a combination of political principle and tactical flexibility.

Stage two: 'Towards socialism and communism'

Stage two of the *BRS* conception of the triumph of communism, and of the interests of the working class, is pressuring the Labour government to enact the contradictory 'left-wing programme'.

Electing a left government committed to the alternative economic and political strategy (AEPS) and its left-wing programme (LWP) will mark the transition of the revolutionary process to a second stage.

This stage will be characterised by a combined parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle to implement major policies of the LWP. The left government will need to work closely with – and be held to account by – the labour movement and the other forces of the popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance, mobilising the maximum support inside and outside Parliament.

The *BRS* envisages, in line with the LWP, help from China, a programme of nationalisation and of capital controls, and increasing taxation of the wealthy.

Even on this last point, one cannot help noticing that the current Labour party leader, Sir Keir Starmer, is so opposed to offending wealth that he opposed even an emergency Covid-19

pandemic wealth tax, aimed at providing emergency support measures to the increasing numbers of British workers facing unemployment and destitution.

Above all, it is unlikely that substantial political advances in Britain [the election of a Labour government?] would have been made in isolation. Working-class and revolutionary movements in other advanced capitalist countries in Europe and in Latin America, Africa and Asia may also be putting their own ruling class under increasing pressure.

So if all else fails, and the *BRS* proves insufficient, hopefully, other nations will come to our aid! There is more than a little of the adventurist Trotskyite understanding of the 'revolutionary process' here. Obviously, we can't just build socialism in Britain (not following the LWP and the *BRS*, at any rate), so we will just hope that the international proletariat rides to our rescue. In reality, the reverse is likely to be true. It is our ruling class whose monopolist financial power and military might are used to retard the social progress of the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

And these people claim to be heirs of the Soviet socialism that smashed the Nazi German war machine with its people's heroic courage and self-sacrifice!

Stage three: 'Transforming' the British capitalist state

Key parts of the state apparatus will try to continue operating in the interests of the system for which they were designed, as will many of their top personnel, who have been selected, trained and promoted to operate it.

To what extent will the monopoly capitalists and their supporters be able to use the state machine to obstruct the LWP? Will

the working class and its allies be able to take control of the administrative and political apparatus, restructure and then replace it with one designed to dismantle capitalism and construct a system that serves the interests of society as a whole?

From the outset, the left government will have to introduce extensive changes in recruitment, staffing and management policies within the civil and diplomatic services, the judiciary, the police, the secret services and armed forces in order to replace key personnel with supporters of the revolutionary process.

The police, secret services and armed forces will have to be made fully and openly answerable to elected representatives of the people at national and British levels. *Their functions and priorities will need to be reviewed and, in some respects, altered fundamentally.*

Substantial improvements in the terms and conditions of employment of uniformed as well as civilian public servants will show them that the left government upholds the interests of all workers. [Boris Johnson will be delighted, as will Simon Case and Lord Sedwill and their entire caste, that their terms and conditions will be improved! Can you not sense their loyalty to capitalism palpably fading away?]

And so, the civil war between the interests of Labour and Capital will be prosecuted by – improving terms and conditions of the agents of the bourgeois state (whose legendary levels of corruption and subordination to the monopoly capitalists have been so glaringly highlighted during the Covid pandemic and the bailing out of Wall Street and the banks during the 2008 and 2020 economic crises, that one needs to be politically and functionally illiterate not to seize upon this as the very essence of the British bourgeois parliament and state apparatus), conducting reviews and changes of personnel, etc. And here is the

apogee of Marxism – as applied 'creatively' to the 'specific historical conditions' of the 'nations' of Britain.

Contrast this again, to the teachings of Marx, Engels and Lenin.

Marx and Engels:

One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz, that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes'.*

Lenin:

A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism, and, therefore, *once capital has gained possession of this very best shell* (through the Palchinskys, Chernovs, Tseretelis and Co [the Browns, Blairs, Corbyns, Johnsons, Hancocks, Starmers], *it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic can shake it.*

We must also note that Engels was most explicit in calling *universal suffrage* [voting – the bourgeois-democratic electoral process itself] *as well an instrument of bourgeois rule.* Universal suffrage, he says, obviously taking account of the long experience of German social democracy, is 'the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the present-day state.'[†]

Is this not confirmed by the experience of the 2021 Batley and Spenningsdale by-election? Did the state, media and the major political parties not collude to play every dirty political and propagandist trick in the book to pervert the course of democracy and pre-

* K Marx and F Engels, Preface to the 1872 German edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, 24 June 1872.

† VI Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, 1917, Chapter 1.

vent the election of the Workers party candidate?

What terrible ultra-leftists and anti-democrats were the founders of communism, of whom the CPB claims to be the follower.

So when all is said and done, *Britain's Road to Socialism* imagines three phases:

1. Election of a left-wing Labour government – that elusive creature!

2. The struggle to implement a 'left-wing programme' – its eclectic shopping list of reforms and fantasies.

3. Resistance of the bourgeois state to be overcome by increasing the pay and conditions of civil servants and judges and by changes in HR recruitment policy!

And that is all, except to note that:

If progress in implementing key policies of the LWP [the fantastic notions of regulating the capitalists into submission, we presume] has been obstructed to a significant extent [obstructed?! But surely we can just contact 'the human resources department' to overcome such obstacles?], then the revolutionary movement and its left government, facing an unfavourable balance of forces, *might have to pursue other policies in the LWP, rather than proceed immediately with those likely to spark decisive confrontations of state power.*

So, we have reached the absolute crunch – when even reformism smashes against the resistance of the bourgeois state – in which case, we shall give up the reformist shopping list to avoid sparking 'decisive confrontations with state power'.

This, gentlemen, is mutiny on one's knees!

Holding state power [may very well] enable the working class and its allies to complete the process of removing all economic and political power from the monopoly capitalist class [but one

can confidently assert that were any serious group of workers ever to attach themselves to this LWP of the CPB's *BRS*, they would never be faced with any such task, as there is absolutely no prospect of them ever progressing beyond phase one – that of winning a 'left-Labour government'] . . .

Without exploitative capitalists and landowners, the division of society into antagonistic social classes will cease to have any material basis. In place of class conflict and social discrimination, social cooperation and equality will predominate.*

And so the *BRS* fades out, with the pious prayer, a parody of the US trade union song: 'We'll have pie in the sky, by and by!'

Marxism's great advance over former, primitive, conceptions of socialism, was its analytical method, which transformed the working class's striving for a just society and meaningful life into a science. But to be pursued and applied correctly, it must be studied.

The *BRS*, though its authors loudly claim every few pages to be the followers and inheritors of the Marxist-Leninist tradition, have sadly and ignominiously turned their party and programme back to utopianism – literally 'no-place', the dreaming up of imaginary societies, or of imagining existing things (the Labour party) to be what they are not, and that they will miraculously respond to fervent wishes that they should be otherwise.

I may hold up a rock and wish it to be transformed into a mobile phone, but it would be a sad outlook were anyone to set up a telecommunications business on such a scheme. The power of science is to apprehend the world *as it is*, and therefore to work out how those actually existing elements and forces can be combined to meet the needs of humanity.

The CPB must either give up its claim to be Marxist, to be

* *BRS*, p66.

a scientific socialist party of the working class, or give up its utopian, eclectic and revisionist programme.

It is sadly likely, however, that it will prove capable of neither, and so, peddling its unattractive wares, life and the working class will pass by the fading organisation and find another force, another party, and another programme that will satisfy its real and pressing material and political needs.

Ranjeet Brar

London, September 2021

BRITAIN'S ROAD TO SOCIALISM?

Appendix 1: Facsimile of the summary page from two editions of the BRS: 2011 and 2020

- Capitalism is a system of exploitation that generates crisis, inequality, corruption, environmental degradation and war; and is innately incapable of solving the most fundamental problems of humanity.
- The capitalist monopoly corporations and the state apparatus which serves their interests are the main obstacles to progress on every front: economic, social, cultural and political.
- Socialism is the only form of society that offers the potential for solving humanity's problems in conditions of individual and collective freedom.
- Because the working class has the most direct and immediate interest in putting an end to capitalism and replacing it with a socialist society, its own class interest also represents the interests of society as a whole.
- In Britain, the potential exists to pursue an alternative economic and political strategy that challenges and ultimately defeats the ruling class.
- More specifically, a popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance can be built, led by the labour movement, to fight for a left-wing programme of policies that would make inroads into the wealth and power of the monopoly capitalists.
- Through an upsurge in working class and popular action, a left government can be elected in Britain based on parliamentary majorities of Labour, socialist, communist and progressive representatives, and strengthened by the election of left majorities in Scotland and Wales.
- In striving to implement the most advanced policies of a left-wing programme (LWP), the mass movement and its left governments will have to engage in a decisive struggle for state power and win.
- Ensuring a united challenge to British state-monopoly capitalism will require a high level of working class and progressive coordination and unity, maximising the democratic potential of national rights in Scotland and Wales and minimising the scope for division.
- Achieving state power and minimising the opportunities for counter-revolution will create the conditions in which capitalism can be fully dismantled and the foundations laid for a democratic and peaceful future in a federal, socialist Britain.
- A socialist society can then be built in which wealth and power are held in common and used in a planned way for the benefit of all, with the working class and its allies liberating the people generally from all forms of exploitation and oppression.
- Putting an end to British imperialism – the exercise of monopoly capitalist exploitation and power in other parts of the world – is the biggest contribution we can make to international human liberation and socialism.
- A Communist Party that exercises mass influence will be essential if Britain's road to socialism is to be realised in practice, through political class struggle.

BRITAIN'S ROAD TO SOCIALISM?

- Capitalism is a system of exploitation that generates crisis, inequality, corruption, environmental degradation and war. It is innately incapable of solving the most fundamental problems of humanity.
- The capitalist monopoly corporations and the state apparatus which serves their interests are the main obstacles to progress on every **front**: economic, environmental, political, social and cultural and political.
- Socialism is the only form of society that offers the potential for solving humanity's problems in conditions of personal and collective freedom.
- Because the working class has the most direct and immediate interest in putting an end to capitalism and replacing it with a socialist society, its own class interest also represents the interests of society generally.
- In Britain, the potential exists to pursue an alternative economic and political strategy that challenges and ultimately defeats the ruling class.
- More specifically, a popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance can be built, led by the labour movement, to fight for a left-wing programme (LWP) of policies that would make inroads into the wealth and power of the monopoly capitalists.
- Any such strategy and programme must include far-reaching policies and action to reduce carbon emissions, which contribute to global warming and cause climate change with disastrous consequences for humanity.
- Through an upsurge in working class and popular action, a left government can be elected in Britain based on parliamentary majorities of Labour, socialist, communist and progressive representatives, and strengthened by the election of left majorities in Scotland and Wales.
- To carry out the most advanced policies of a left-wing programme, the mass movement and its left governments will have to engage in a decisive struggle for state power (the means by which one class enforces its rule over other classes and in society as a whole).
- A united challenge to British state-monopoly capitalism will require a high level of working class and progressive coordination and unity, maximising the democratic potential of national rights in Scotland and Wales and minimising the scope for division.
- Achieving state power and minimising the opportunities for counter-revolution will create the conditions in which to dismantle capitalism progressively and lay the foundations for a democratic, environmentally sustainable and peaceful future in a federal, socialist Britain.
- A socialist society can then be built in which wealth and power are held in common and used in a planned way for the benefit of all, with the working class and its allies liberating the people from all forms of exploitation and oppression.
- Putting an end to British imperialism – the exercise of monopoly capitalist exploitation and power in other parts of the world – is the biggest contribution we can make to international liberation and socialism.
- A Communist Party that exercises mass influence will be essential if Britain is to take the road to socialism in practice, through political class struggle.

Appendix 2: VI Lenin's Letter to the British workers⁹

Comrades

First of all permit me to thank you for sending your delegation here to acquaint themselves with Soviet Russia. When your delegation suggested to me that I should send a letter through them to the British workers and perhaps also proposals to the British government, I replied that I gratefully accepted the first suggestion but that I must address myself to the government, not through a workers' delegation but directly, on behalf of our government, through Comrade Chicherin.¹⁰

We have on very many occasions addressed ourselves this way to the British government, making the most formal and solemn proposals to start peace talks. All our representatives – Comrade Litvinov, Comrade Krasin and the rest – are unceasingly continuing to make these proposals. The British government stubbornly refuses to accept them. It is not surprising, therefore, that I desired to speak to the delegates of the British workers exclusively as delegates of the workers, not as a representative of the government of Soviet Russia, but simply as a communist.

I was not surprised to find that several members of your delegation hold a standpoint, not of the working class but of the

bourgeoisie, of the exploiting class: in all capitalist countries the imperialist war fully revealed an old ulcer, namely, the desertion of the majority of the workers' parliamentary and trade union leaders to the side of the bourgeoisie.

On the false pretext of 'defence of country' they were actually defending the predatory interests of either of the two groups of robbers of the entire world – the Anglo-American-French group, or the German group; they entered into an alliance with the bourgeoisie, against the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat; they covered up this treachery with sentimental petty-bourgeois reformist and pacifist phrases about peaceful evolution, constitutional methods, democracy, etc.

This is what happened in all countries; it is not surprising that in Britain this state of affairs has also been reflected in the composition of your delegation.

Members of your delegation, Shaw and Guest – obviously surprised and hurt by my statement that Britain, notwithstanding our peace proposals and notwithstanding the declarations of her government, is continuing her intervention, waging war against us and helping Wrangel in the Crimea and whiteguard Poland – asked me whether I had proof of this, and whether I could show how many trainloads of military supplies Britain had provided Poland with, etc.

I replied that, to obtain the secret treaties of the British government, it was necessary to overthrow it in a revolutionary manner and to seize all its foreign policy documents in the same way as we did in 1917. Any educated man, anybody sincerely interested in politics, was aware even prior to our revolution that the tsar had secret treaties with the predatory governments of Britain, France, America, Italy and Japan concerning the division of the spoils, concerning Constantinople, Galicia [Ukraine/Poland], Armenia, Syria, Mesopotamia [Iraq], etc. Only liars and hypocrites (excluding, of course, absolutely ignorant, backward and illiterate people) could deny this, or pretend

not to know of this.

However, without a revolution, we could never have obtained the secret documents of the predatory governments of the capitalist class.

Those leaders or representatives of the British proletariat – whether they are members of parliament, trade union leaders, journalists, or others – who pretend ignorance of the secret treaties between Britain, France, America, Italy, Japan and Poland concerning the plunder of other countries, concerning the division of the spoils, and who do not wage a revolutionary struggle in order to expose these treaties, are merely *once again showing that they are faithful servants of the capitalists*.*

We have known this for a long time; we are exposing this in our own country and in all other countries of the world. The visit to Russia of a delegation of the British workers will hasten the exposure of such leaders in Britain too.

I had a conversation with your delegation on Wednesday 26 May. On the following day telegrams arrived stating that Bonar Law had admitted in the British parliament that military aid had been given to Poland in October “for defence against Russia” (of course only for defence, and only in October! There are still ‘influential labour leaders’ in Britain who are helping the capitalists to dupe the workers!), but the *New Statesman*, the most moderate of moderate petty-bourgeois newspapers or journals, wrote of tanks being supplied to Poland, which were more powerful than those used against the Germans during the war.

After this, can one refrain from ridiculing such ‘leaders’ of the British workers who ask with an air of injured innocence whether there is any ‘proof’ that Britain is fighting against Russia and is helping Poland and the whiteguards in the Crimea?

Members of the delegation asked me which I considered more important: the formation in Britain of a consistently revo-

* *My emphasis throughout* – RB.

lutionary Communist party, or obtaining the immediate aid of the masses of the workers in Britain for the cause of peace with Russia. I replied that this is a matter of one's convictions. *Sincere supporters of the emancipation of the workers from the yoke of capital cannot possibly be opposed to the formation of a Communist party, which alone is capable of training the workers in a non-bourgeois and non-petty-bourgeois manner, and is alone capable of genuinely exposing, ridiculing and disgracing 'leaders' who can doubt whether Britain is helping Poland, etc.*

There is no need to fear the Communists will be too numerous in Britain, because there is not even a small Communist party there. *But if anyone continues to remain in intellectual slavery to the bourgeoisie, and continues to share petty-bourgeois prejudices about 'democracy' (bourgeois democracy), pacifism, etc, then of course such people would only do more harm to the proletariat if they took it into their heads to call themselves Communists, and affiliate to the Third International.* All that these people are capable of doing is to pass sentimental 'resolutions' against intervention couched exclusively in philistine phrases.

In a certain sense these resolutions are also useful, namely, in the sense that the old 'leaders' (adherents of bourgeois democracy, of peaceful methods, etc, etc) will make themselves ridiculous in the eyes of the masses, and the more they pass empty, non-committal resolutions unaccompanied by revolutionary action, the sooner will they expose themselves.

Let each man stick to his job: *let the Communists work directly through their party, awakening the revolutionary consciousness of the workers.* Let those who supported the 'defence of the country' during the imperialist war for the partitioning of the world, 'defence' of the secret treaty between the British capitalists and the tsar to plunder Turkey, let those who 'do not see' that Britain is helping Poland and the whiteguards in Russia – let such people hasten to increase the number of their 'peace

resolutions' to the point of becoming ridiculous; the more they do that, the sooner will they meet with the fate of Kerensky, the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries in Russia.

Several members of your delegation questioned me with surprise about the Red Terror, about the absence of freedom of the press in Russia, of freedom of assembly, about our persecution of Mensheviks and pro-Menshevik workers, etc. My reply was that *the real cause of the terror is the British imperialists and their 'allies'*, who practised and are still practising a White terror in Finland and in Hungary, in India and in Ireland, who have been supporting Yudenich, Kolchak, Denikin, Pilsudski and Wrangel.

Our Red terror is a defence of the working class against the exploiters, the crushing of resistance from the exploiters with whom the Socialist-Revolutionaries, the Mensheviks and an insignificant number of pro-Menshevik workers have sided. Freedom of the press and assembly under bourgeois democracy is freedom for the wealthy to conspire against the working people, freedom for the capitalists to bribe and buy up the press. I have explained this in newspaper articles so often that I have derived no pleasure in repeating myself.

Two days after my talk with your delegation, the newspapers reported that, besides the arrests of Monatte and Lorient in France, Sylvia Pankhurst had been arrested in Britain. This is the best possible reply the British government could give to a question that the non-communist British labour 'leaders', who are captives to bourgeois prejudices, are afraid even to ask, namely, *which class the terror is directed against – the oppressed and exploited, or the oppressors and exploiters?*

Is it a question of the 'freedom' of the capitalists to rob, deceive and dupe the working people, or of the 'freedom' of the toilers from the yoke of the capitalists, the speculators and the property-owners? *Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst represents the interests of hundreds upon hundreds of millions of people who*

are oppressed by the British and other capitalists. That is why she is subjected to a White terror, has been deprived of liberty, etc. The labour 'leaders' who pursue a non-communist policy are 99 percent representatives of the bourgeoisie, of its deceit, its prejudices.

In conclusion, I want to thank you once again, comrades, for having sent your delegation here. Despite the hostility of many of the delegates towards the Soviet system and the dictatorship of the proletariat, and although many of them are in the grip of bourgeois prejudices, their acquaintance with Soviet Russia will inevitably accelerate the collapse of capitalism throughout the world.

N Lenin

30 May 1920

NOTES

- 1 This article first appeared in three parts in *Lalkar* of May, July and September 2021. See *lalkar.org*. (p5)
- 2 During World War Two, industrial relations were controlled by the Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order, usually known as Order 1305.

The order effectively banned strikes and forced any side in a dispute (usually the trade union) to bring its case to an arbitration panel rather than to go on strike. In 1951, the order was still in force and dockworkers were prosecuted for not following it. (See the 1951 Cabinet memorandum on ending restrictions on unions, National Archives) (p8)

- 3 Tom Bell, leading member of the British Socialist Party (BSP), a delegate at the second congress of the Third International and closely involved in the unity discussions between British socialists that led to the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), recorded in his book *Pioneering Days* that the question of affiliation to the Labour party was so contentious that advice was sought from the executive committee of the International.

The reply came back in the form of a letter from Comrade Lenin: 'Having received the letter of the joint provisional committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain, dated 20 June [1920], I hasten to reply, in accordance with their request, that I am in complete sympathy with their plans for the immediate organisation of a communist party in England. I consider the policy of Sylvia Pankhurst and of the Workers' Socialist Federation in refusing to collaborate in the amalgamation of the British Socialist Party, Socialist Labour Party, and others, into one communist party to be wrong.

I, personally, am in favour of participation in parliament, and of *adhesion to the Labour Party on condition of free and independent communist activity*. This policy I am going to defend at the second congress of the Third International on 15

July, in Moscow. I consider it most desirable that a communist party be speedily organised on the basis of the principles and decisions of the Third International, and that the party be brought into close contact with the Industrial Workers of the World and shop stewards committees, in order to bring about complete union.

Lenin was interested in the unity of the militant leadership of the working class in order to bring about a really socialist society, based on the rule of the working class. All should be done to bring about this state of affairs. And the more speedily the reformist leadership could be exposed and cast aside the better. This was the tactical position characteristic of Leninism and expounded in detail throughout his works. (p11)

- 4 The Independent Labour party (ILP) was the forerunner of the modern Labour party, and started with a federal structure that allowed different labour organisations to affiliate to it, including, for example, the British Socialist party (BSP). The ILP's stated aim was to represent the interests of working men in Parliament.

In 1920, there had not yet been a Labour administration. Arthur Henderson, however, was a noted pro-war leader of the Labour party who joined Liberal prime minister Herbert Asquith's war cabinet and whom Lenin referred to as 'socialist in words, imperialist in deeds', or 'social-imperialist'. (p11)

- 5 Interested readers should study Harpal Brar's *Perestroika – the Complete Collapse of Revisionism* (1992) for a comprehensive analysis of this topic. (p20)
- 6 In the 1997 general election, the CPB ran five candidates whose combined vote came to 911. In the 2001 general election, the party ran six candidates whose combined vote came to 1,003. In 2005, the party fielded six candidates whose combined vote came to 1,124. (p32)
- 7 The Young Communist League (YCL) is the youth wing of the CPB. (p35)
- 8 With respect to the Labour party, most of the members of the organisation's executive, as well as forty Labour MPs in Parliament, lent their support to the recruiting campaign for World War One. Only one section held aloof – the Independent Labour party. (p38)
- 9 This letter was written at the request of the TUC and Labour party parliamentary delegation that met with Lenin in 1920. It was published in *Pravda* No 130 on 17 June 1920. It was also published in *Izvestia*, *Kommunistichesky Trud*, and *Gudok*.

On the same day, it was published in Britain in *The Call*, the weekly of the British Socialist Party. On 19 June, the letter was published in *The Workers'*

BRITAIN'S ROAD TO SOCIALISM?

Dreadnought, organ of the Workers' Socialist Federation of England and in the journal *The Russia Outlook*, and on 22 June, it was published in Labour's *Daily Herald*. It was subsequently repeatedly published both in Russia and abroad. (p93)

10 First Soviet ambassador to Great Britain. (p93)

Books by Harpal Brar

Perestroika: The Complete Collapse of Revisionism (1992)

Trotskyism or Leninism? (1993)

Social Democracy: The Enemy Within (1995)

Imperialism: Decadent, Parasitic, Moribund Capitalism (1997)

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Chimurenga! The Liberation Struggle in Zimbabwe (Ed, 2004)

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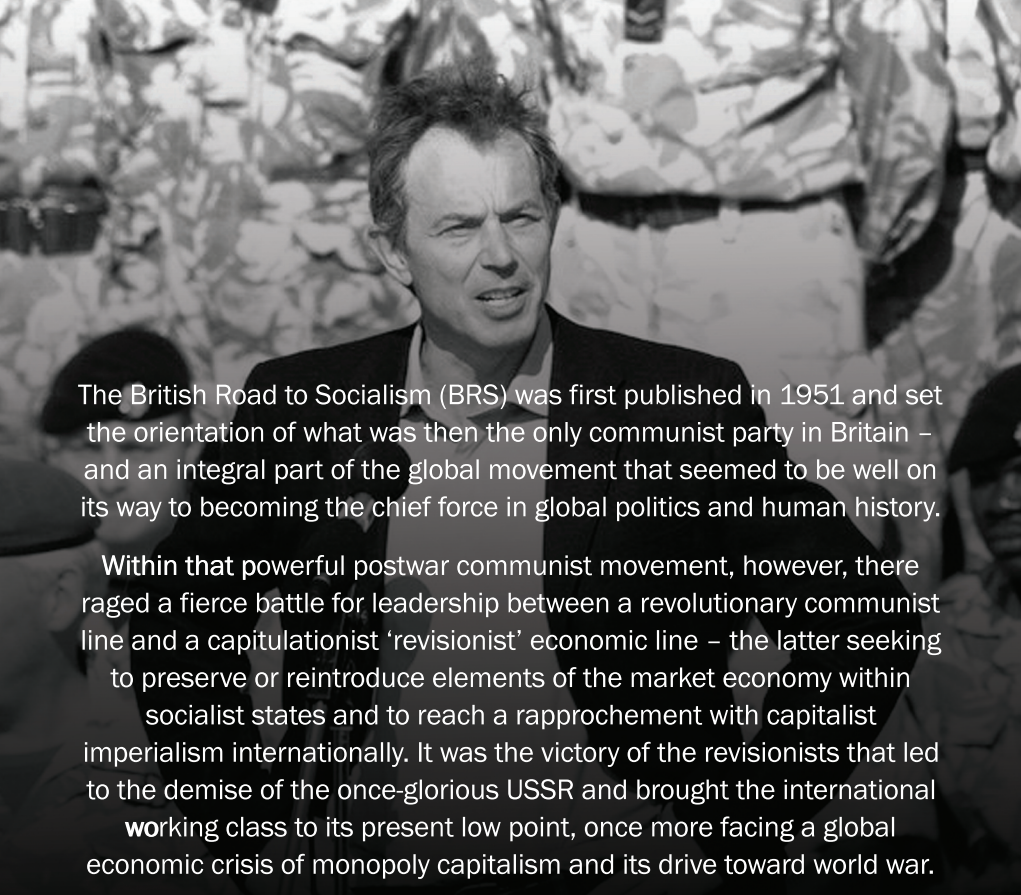
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The British Road to Socialism (BRS) was first published in 1951 and set the orientation of what was then the only communist party in Britain – and an integral part of the global movement that seemed to be well on its way to becoming the chief force in global politics and human history.

Within that powerful postwar communist movement, however, there raged a fierce battle for leadership between a revolutionary communist line and a capitulationist ‘revisionist’ economic line – the latter seeking to preserve or reintroduce elements of the market economy within socialist states and to reach a rapprochement with capitalist imperialism internationally. It was the victory of the revisionists that led to the demise of the once-glorious USSR and brought the international working class to its present low point, once more facing a global economic crisis of monopoly capitalism and its drive toward world war.

The BRS was a minor wing of the revisionist section of the international communist movement. Its central premise has remained constant ever since 1951, and can be crudely but accurately summarised in the slogan: ‘Vote Labour everywhere!’

This book examines the history and ideas of the BRS, contrasting them with the real history of the Labour party, to demonstrate that the British working class has made and will make no progress towards its liberation from capitalist wage slavery until it discards the practice, slogan and justifying ‘theory’ of voting for and supporting the Labour party.

A century of policy and practice has incontrovertibly proved that the Labour party is not a party that fights for the interests of working people, but against them. It has been and remains a ‘Tory party mark two’; an integral part of the dictatorship of the monopoly capitalist class.

ISBN: 978-1-913286-07-1

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