



REAL CONTROL FOR REAL INDEPENDENCE

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Britain is out of the European Union. It is an immense achievement, a victory won despite the united opposition of the establishment – the City, the CBI, the political parties, the archbishops, not to mention the media and most of the trade union executives. And won by workers, aided by a few temporary allies in the capitalist class, some of whom genuinely care about the future of Britain.

Now a new fight faces the working class: real independence. That issue was hardly if ever raised before Britain joined the EEC, forerunner of the EU. The overwhelming vote in 1975 to confirm, by more than 2 to 1, membership of the EEC, reflected a defeated mentality in the working class, a deep lack of confidence in their ability to solve the problems of the day.

Real independence is the complete opposite of the phoney independence offered by the SNP or Plaid Cymru. It is about asserting control, not handing it back to the EU. The break-up of Britain, if permitted, would be a great setback for the British working class.

The 2016 referendum was a landmark whose significance is only now starting to be appreciated, close as the result was. Reflecting as it does an understanding that independence is the only way forward, the referendum set Britain and its working class on a new track.

The necessary direction of travel is clear, and it now runs directly counter to the globalist plans of imperialism worldwide. Finance capitalism seeks a world where it can operate without hindrance, an approach summed up in the new phrase of Global Britain. They mean a world where their capital can migrate at will, and in return they are happy to grant the same privilege to global capital – the liberty to shift in and out of Britain as it feels fit.

And as with capital, so with labour too. Britain has left the EU, but there is no intention on the part of the capitalist class to control the movement of labour. Witness the new “points” system introduced in January 2021 – the effective abandonment of a cap on immigration, the explicit abandonment of any requirement to show that jobs cannot be filled by skilled labour here, the massive extension of “pilot” schemes for seasonal workers.

They want the four freedoms of the EU – the movement of capital, goods, services and “persons” (a legal obfuscation...it means both companies and labour), but they want it for the whole world.

We know what that would mean. The continued sale of British assets overseas, the continued decline of manufacturing, the end of steel production. The end of a future for generations of young workers denied the opportunity to express their talent and enthusiasm in useful work. Forget the patronising talk of the “left behind” – millions are to be deliberately dumped in the flight to the so-called free market.

Keep Britain united

Leaving the EU has given all of us an opportunity to strengthen British unity by rebuilding our economy. Together, the working class across Britain

can and must build on its long history of workers’ unity. Investment in transport and energy infrastructure integrated across Britain will further strengthen that unity.

Constitutional upheaval does not strengthen our unity. Workers must now take charge in our industries and public services, our fisheries and our farms, and fight together to build the real economy in the interests of the whole of Britain.

The EU’s great hope is that its allies in the SNP, Plaid Cymru, and the Welsh Labour Party will succeed in breaking up Britain and returning parts of our nation to Brussels. It hopes that weakness and division will work to its advantage. Ensuring the failure of that strategy is one of the key tasks facing workers throughout Britain in this coming period.

A united Britain is our best defence against predatory global capital. The world’s multinational corporations don’t want to deal with nation states that uphold their own sovereignty. Separation, devolution, federalism, regionalism, privatisation and deregulation all break up Britain in one way or another. All let multinational corporations operate more freely.

Workers developed the nation of Britain and our democratic working class culture. It is our common legacy. Far more unites us than divides us. Governments come and go, while working class unity is fundamental and should be enduring. A united Britain is a condition for progress.

Ireland has always been a separate nation, though one divided by a colonial history. We want the friendliest relations with the whole of Ireland. And we stand against EU attempts to use the Protocol to keep a toehold in the UK. Only the people of Ireland can decide the future of the island.

The crisis returns

Workers must prepare for an onslaught on living standards driven by a mounting legacy of debt, not created by the Covid-19 pandemic but now even more severe.

After the financial collapse of 2007/9 a common refrain was “extend and pretend”. Extend involved buying political time by rescheduling the debt, putting repayment off for 15 years or more. The pretend part involved making out that things would revert to “normal” over time and that the monetary structure is resilient. This make-believe economics was dignified with a fancy term – Quantitative Easing.

Adding 15 or more years to 2007/9 takes us to around 2022-2024 onwards. So the current period has always been likely to mark the beginnings of a major financial unravelling. As to the pretence of resilience, the emerging reality is the opposite.

The reality is the 2007/9 debt is now coming up for redemption. But since it can’t be repaid, it will have to be renewed on terms acceptable to the creditors, extending Quantitative Easing into the future. The main creditors are the Bank of England, workers’ savings in particular pension funds, and overseas investors. But the Bank and the pension funds are regulatory captives of the government and will carry on buying government debt (so-called gilt-edged securities) until they go pop, even while

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repayment is pushed further and further away. This leaves overseas investors as the only ones with leverage. Unless restricted – and no government has shown any appetite to do that – they will be able to shake down the government by providing protection money to maintain its finances. In return they will expect the government to do as it is told. The Bank of England even described this dependence on overseas investors as the “kindness of strangers”.

This all makes the current period highly dangerous. History shows that when finance unravels in a major way (not just in a normal periodic slump) either workers take control or the call for military war and a British domestic war on workers becomes generalised.

War and peace

Imperialism is also raising the risk of war. Western imperialist hatred of Russia and China is driven in significant part by those two countries’ history of revolution – capitalists never forget nor forgive those who challenge their power – but in even greater part by their industrial and financial muscle. Even so, this is not the 1930s, with the European powers egging on Nazi Germany to destroy the Soviet Union. It’s more like 1914: imperialist war to divide up the spoils of the entire planet.

Much time over the years has been spent debating whether war is inevitable under capitalism, as Lenin advanced. What we do know is that the presence of strong, armed socialism in the world held capital back from the kind of disputes that could have ended in a world conflagration.

The world was a safer place with the Soviet Union in it. It was safer, too, when China restricted itself to upholding its own sovereignty. And the world is even less safe with our own government seeking to back up its Global Britain push with the armed forces redesigned not to protect Britain but to protect and expand imperial interests abroad.

We said that the demise of socialism in the USSR would lead to the untrammelled establishment of capitalist trading blocs, and that trading blocs can become warfighting blocs. That is now happening. The people must intervene in order to prevent the current provocations from escalating into war.

We denounce this government’s warmongering attempts to take Britain back east of Aden. Britain should have no role there save to trade. It must renounce the role of spear carrier for the US imperialist mass murderers.

The politics of opposition to war must be seized by the same people who, against establishment opposition, forced us out of the EU: the honest, concerned mass of working people.

Leaving the EU was one thing. Leaving NATO will be of a different order altogether – but just as essential.

A future for Britain

Britain is a working class nation. Independence requires that workers assert the right to work, the right to skill. The right to housing, to education and

health. The right to determine what medicines we use, and to produce them here. Above all, the right to be a truly productive nation, a nation where things are made.

A working class must have modern industry. Productive land must be used to produce food for the people. Britain cannot cut itself off from the world, but an independent working class can never allow Britain to be held hostage by outside forces.

Young workers must be brought into work, with employers forced to take on apprentices, paid for out of company profits. The country needs entirely new workplaces, making entirely new things. That goes for the established industries such as engineering, but also for the newer ones – biotechnology and information technology for example.

But where is the investment in the education of the people? Instead capitalism is content to see talent undeveloped here. Even the government’s new Office for Talent, ostensibly to boost British science, is exclusively charged with making it easier to import talent trained abroad.

And where are the new industries, the new industrial workforces? Not here, not in the quantity there should be. In a country dominated by finance capital and its need for short-term profit, the practical benefits of Britain’s outstanding – and often curiosity-driven – science are usually not realised here; instead they are developed abroad. Meanwhile, the proportion of our workforce engaged in manufacturing fell by 62% between 1982 and 2018.

The lesson here is that, outstanding as British research is, it must be used to advance the interests of British workers by feeding into new methods of production, based here. Manufacture, making things, is still essential to Britain. You can’t eat a financial derivative. You can’t live in a junk bond. New industries are essential to the future of Britain: they will not come without science and technology. The alternative is decline, both of Britain and of the British working class.

A sovereign nation must also have its own technology. Without technology sovereignty Britain’s IT infrastructure could be held to ransom by foreign governments or companies. In particular, Britain could become squeezed in the growing confrontation between China and the USA.

A sovereign nation must also be in control of its own energy production. Never again should France be able to threaten to cut off electricity to Jersey at the flick of a switch, as President Macron did this year in the row over fishing rights. Workers in the industry quickly need to plan our energy needs; British engineers can build the Small Nuclear Reactors that will give us time to develop the large reactors and other effective renewable sources of energy.

Science has shown that climate change is happening, but for too many people the answer is to reject the help that science can provide through, for example, new nuclear technologies (the old ones would be better than abandoning nuclear) or new genetic technologies. Workers deserve improvements in the quality of the environment (which capitalism doesn’t want to pay for if not forced). The

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dreadful quality of air in towns and cities, where most workers live, is a scandal. But we reject the anti-people philosophy that says the answer to climate change is less industry, fewer people, an end to progress.

In health all workers must assert the need to train enough health professionals here and stop trying to get them from among EU and non-EU workers. End the looting of the talent of the developing world. In agriculture, backward farmers who don't want to modernise, who wish to continue old practices of back-breaking work on the land which only desperate migrants will do, must be made to improve or get out. They must be made to train better, pay better, and invest in new technology. Denying them cheap labour from overseas would be an excellent first step.

We have described in *Workers* the many ways in which the EU is a disaster for the environment. Free from the EU, Britain has the opportunity to make huge environmental gains, but only if control is taken away from capital. Stop fining companies, or at least stop just fining. Instead, make pollution or Volkswagen-style environmental cheating by a company a criminal offence. Lock up boards of directors. Taking the profit motive out of the provision of water would be a start.

If workers can be trained here then products can be made here. No need to go abroad for vaccines, for PPE, for ventilators (in truth, they could always have been made here). Those things should be made here not imported from factories in countries like India, where the need is far greater. If there is a surplus, export them to countries that need them.

End division

To judge by the media – both social media and the dwindling “mass” media – Britain would appear to be a country that talks of nothing but whether to topple statues. In fact most workers have no interest in such time-wasting discussions. Workers tend to take a common sense approach, the objective struggle of day to day life under capitalism brings material reality to the fore.

What most workers resent is being told to apologise for everything. For advantages they were never handed and don't feel. For the crimes of British imperialism. For having a job.

In our Party Programme of 1971, we rejected the lie that the working class “became a partner in capitalism in imperialist plunder and was rewarded with the ‘crumbs’ of this plunder”. The opposite was true: the expansion of empire and the industrial revolution were accompanied by huge increases in the working day, poverty wages, and low life expectancy.

Now the lie has been resurrected, but with a new twist. This time, it is “white privilege”, a concept imported from the United States with no relevance in Britain. A whole anti-racist industry has grown up, with good incomes and profits to be made. Sowing division among the people has become a profitable commerce in itself, witness the “transphobia” and “islamophobia” industries.

An accusation of racism, islamophobia (a

catchall term exposing the bigotry of those who use it) or transphobia can end in the sack or blight a career. No wonder the Sewell Report from the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities met with hysterical outrage, its members subjected to vile racial slurs and death threats. In fact, the report examined extensive evidence and found a largely tolerant, decent British people.

More worryingly a series of high-profile scandals has revealed a rottenness embedded in many of the trade unions which ought to be advancing the interests of workers. Muted responses to the child exploitation scandal in Rotherham and elsewhere, the failure of the NEU to speak up publicly for the Batley Grammar School teacher suspended by his head teacher and subjected to death threats, students and researchers suspended or sacked for saying that biological women exist.

All this matters, because it highlights the fact that most trade union members have given up on exercising control over their organisations. Few vote in elections for executive members or general secretaries. Fewer still play any kind of part in the running of unions, especially but not exclusively outside the workplace. How can workers expect to exert control over their own country when they abandon the structures of their own defensive organisations?

The fight for the future of Britain is inconceivable without a focus on work, on employment and on production. And for all their weaknesses, most unions have policies – good policies for the most part – that address those issues. But there's no point in having a policy but lacking the will or ability to fight for it.

The road ahead

The fight ahead will be hard, harder by far than to leave the European Union. Already, those who saw the EU merely as a hindrance to free trade have peeled away. We always knew they would (just as they knew we would diverge from them). But the fight for independence is the only road that brings progress for the working class.

The general direction of travel is clear, while the nature of the fight facing us in the coming years is still taking shape. Some things don't change. Once again, workers will face the opposition of the establishment and will have to organise and unite across the country to achieve our aims'.

The division between Remain and Leave, so significant in the fight to extract ourselves from the EU, is over. We should hardly – if ever now – be using those terms, except perhaps to describe history. The overwhelming majority of workers, those who want control over their lives, jobs and a future for our children, those who dispute the right of the multinationals to rule the Earth must unite in the cause of real independence. And the Party must play our part in developing that unity.

What to do? Each part of the class could look at what it couldn't do before Britain left the EU, and now try to do it. For instance, the fishing industry can now assert itself. It can demand that the government uses fisheries protection vessels to see off

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foreign craft not observing our rights, and the rest of us must echo that call. Similarly for the steel industry, and for food and farming.

We must use what has been won so far to push forward. Training, skills, industries to provide for the needs of our country must be identified and pushed for.

One area in desperate need of attention is the trade unions. The extent of their separation from the mass of the working class was evident in the 2016 referendum campaign, when only a handful spoke for the interests of the class and most were firmly installed in the EU gravy train. That must be reversed. Members must begin to exert control, to focus energy and resources on the issues that unite us, not those that divide.

Covid-19

When the Covid-19 pandemic began, few of us could have had any idea of the extent to which it would transform thought in Britain (not to speak of the rest of the world). Even now we probably underestimate the lessons workers are drawing from it. Very little in Britain will be the same again.

Some lessons are clear and widely appreciated. First and foremost that social planning is essential to life. That goes for the NHS, for social care, for housing (who would have thought that evictions would be banned for more than a year?). Also the realisation that if workers want to live – literally – they need a properly planned approach to production, led by people who know what they're doing. If it can be done with vaccines, why not with everything else? That has now become a revolutionary question.

Over-reliance on long supply chains saw interruptions to imported goods of all kinds, both destined for consumers and for industry. "Re-shoring" is now back on the agenda, and with it the prospect of more employment here, less pressure to out-source, the basis for greater confidence among workers generally. Independence is no longer seen by so many as an abstract notion of sovereignty: it is about securing the conditions of life for the people of this country.

Of huge significance, the predictable and lamentable performance of the European Union has cut the ground from under the feet of those who still dreamt (some still do) of overturning the referendum of 2016. Not that it needed any help from Covid-19 – its machinations over Ireland, its threat to cut electricity from Jersey, and so on, have played their part.

By and large, workers accept this. But none of it will be sustainable if the working class allows capitalism to rule – and that is something workers must come to accept. Capitalism's only plan is to have no plan at all. They don't need a plan because they have decided that there's more money to be made by profiting from the anarchy of the market. And in so doing they have forfeited the right to rule.

The vote for Brexit was above all an affirmation that decisions affecting Britain must be made in Britain. That will not happen unless the people of

Britain have control – and exercise it – over the fundamentals of existence.

Here, then, is the challenge facing the working class, the vast majority of the people of Britain: how to move from opposition to foreign control to the understanding that the working class must rule. From defence to attack. From negative to positive. It means wiping away more than a century of social democracy, the philosophy that some well-meaning political party will take care of workers, on their behalf.

Social democracy is rooted within the working class itself. The idea that workers can leave it to others, that the Labour Party (for example) will save the working class, is deeply ingrained but now faltering.

A positive lesson from the Covid-19 emergency is that workers took over – workers changed the NHS, developed the vaccines, rolled out the vaccination programmes, and embraced the vaccines – ensuring the survival of the vast majority of us.

By contrast, the government has used the crisis to take more powers. A negative lesson from the pandemic is the apparent acceptance by many workers that the government knows best. It feels that it need not submit its decisions to even the cursory oversight of bourgeois democracy (exemplified by its refusal to submit its trade deals to scrutiny). It's an ominous tendency, something to be nipped in the bud.

Conclusion

All the bourgeois parties set themselves up as the saviours of the people. But only the people can save themselves. Only the people can save Britain.

In finally leaving the snares of the EU workers won an immense victory. The working class in its irrepressibility and creativity must seize the great opportunities that victory has offered. The forces of capitalism certainly will fiercely defend their own interests.

The fight for independence can and must develop into one for a new Britain, not a recreation of the old.

Materialism is largely accepted in Britain. But not yet dialectical materialism: the working class has yet to accept that it must assert the control needed for real British independence.

Class struggle does not necessarily lead to the victory of one of the contending classes. As Marx noted in the Communist Manifesto, it can end in the common ruin of both. In Britain now the bourgeoisie and the working class seem locked in a spiral of decline – the bourgeoisie because it has either abandoned production in favour of speculation, or decamped abroad; and the working class because so far it has failed to accept that only revolution can save it.

Our task as a Party is as it was when we were founded: to change the ideology of the working class. Always materialist in approach – how could it be otherwise in a class whose existence is defined by work that changes material reality? – workers have still to grasp that they must be the agents of change.

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