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New Edition

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BRITAIN'S ROAD TO SOCIALISM

- 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.

This is the 8th edition of the Communist Party's programme. First published in 1951 as *The British Road to Socialism*, subsequent editions were issued in 1952, 1958, 1968, 1977 and 1989. The 7th edition in 2000 was renamed *Britain's Road to Socialism*. This new 8th edition was adopted by the executive committee in July 2011.

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BRITAIN'S ROAD TO SOCIALISM

Introduction

In this programme, the Communist Party of Britain explains its view that capitalism must be overthrown in the interests of the working class, the people and humanity. It identifies the forces and the strategy by which the power of the capitalist monopoly corporations and their state can be replaced by state power in the hands of the working class and its allies.

The programme argues that socialism is the only alternative system of society that can meet the essential needs of the people and humanity as a whole, providing the basis for ending all forms of exploitation and oppression. Once the threat of counter-revolution has been irrevocably defeated, nationally and internationally, the transition

from the lower stage of communism to its higher stage can then be completed.

This programme is based on the study, analysis and assessment of concrete realities, tendencies and trends. It is intended to be 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.

Above all, it is subject to the Marxist insistence that the liberation of the working class and the emancipation of the people can only be achieved by the action of the working class and the people themselves. Freedom cannot be imposed from outside or above – it has to be fought for and won by the overwhelming majority of the population.



I Capitalism and exploitation

IN THE FIRST half of the 21st century, after more than 200 years of capitalist domination, humanity faces a series of inter-related crises that imperil the very existence of our species and our planet.

Two billion of the Earth's seven billion population lack adequate nutrition, sanitation, healthcare and education. The world faces a catastrophic energy crisis, as finite resources are depleted without the development of safe, sustainable alternatives. At the same time, burning fossil fuels is warming the planet and changing climate patterns with potentially disastrous consequences for us all. Wars continue to devastate human lives on a massive scale, while the existence and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction carry the threat of even greater horrors to come.

Communists hold capitalism primarily responsible for these crises, for taking the planet and its peoples towards the edge of the abyss.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALISM AND IMPERIALISM

The term 'capitalism' was coined by its early advocates, not by its opponents. It denotes the type of society in which the class of people who own industry and commerce largely shape economic, social, cultural and political developments. This capitalist class uses its power to extract surplus value from those who are employed, namely, the working class.

The capitalists, who own the means of production (industrial and commercial plant and machinery, land, energy and raw materials, etc.), pay workers a wage in return for their labour power. But human beings have the capacity to produce more value through their labour than the value of the wage they need to buy life's essential commodities. This 'surplus' value accrues to the employer when the products of that labour are sold as commodities at normal market prices. It is the source of capitalist profit, which funds share dividends, loan interest, commercial rent, expanded investment, etc. The extraction of surplus value is the essence of capitalist exploitation.

The super-exploitation of slave labour in the colonies provided much of the raw materials, the super-profits and the fresh capital vital for the industrialisation of Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

As capitalism developed, its drive to maximise profit revolutionised industry, commerce, science, technology, culture, politics and society in general. In the most advanced capitalist countries, a small number of large combines, trusts and syndicates between them came to monopolise each major branch of the economy. Crucial to this development was the contribution of women's work in the home to creating labour power's capacity to

produce surplus value. The oppression of women in society, which maintains this role, became even more important for monopoly capital as workers organised to fight for higher wages.

Through the fusion of banking and industrial capital to form finance capital, the banks and other financial institutions came to dominate industry and commerce. Finance capitalists used key shareholdings, directorships and credit to exercise control.

The monopolies were compelled to find more investment outlets abroad for their accumulated capital. In particular, they seized control of raw materials and cheap labour, thereby pre-empting imperialist rivals. More and more of these monopolies established themselves as transnational corporations (TNCs), locating some of their operations in at least one country beyond their home base.

This extension of economic power into already-conquered colonies and 'semi-colonies' (nominally independent but under foreign economic domination) was backed by the state power of their 'home' country. Thus capitalism entered its 'imperialist' stage towards the end of the 19th century.

The chief characteristics of imperialism are 'monopolisation' (the domination of each branch of the national economy by a small number of giant companies), inter-imperialist rivalry, and colonial or – in countries that have won formal political independence – neo-colonial super-exploitation.

The conflict between British, German, French, Russian and other imperialisms culminated in the bloodbath of the First World War. In the Russian empire, the corruption and incompetence of a landlord-police state helped forge an alliance between the peasants' struggle against landlordism and the workers' struggle against capitalism. Out of this came the October Revolution of 1917, through which the Bolsheviks and their allies seized political state power and went on to found the Soviet Union.

In the leading capitalist countries, the demands of 'total war' stimulated important shifts in productive forces (plant, machinery, energy, labour, technology, etc.) and the economic relations between society's classes. The state intervened to take command of the war economy, promoting monopolisation and methods of mass production which sharply raised the productivity of labour. The war thus accelerated the fusion between the economic power of the monopolies and the political power of the state (the government and civil service, parliament, the police and intelligence services, the armed forces, the courts and prison system, local government, etc.).

The result has been the system known as 'state-

monopoly capitalism'. Big business came to play a more prominent and direct role in state and political affairs and vice-versa. The state used its financial, diplomatic and military power to protect and promote the interests of the monopolists.

Capitalism was re-stabilised in the mid-1920s. The capitalist state mobilised to defeat trade union militancy and attempts at revolution, productive capacity grew faster than workers' consuming power. This contradiction laid the basis for the 1929 financial crash and the Great Depression of the early 1930s. Only massive state intervention in the economy, including preparations for war, began to rebuild industry and ameliorate social conditions in Britain, the United States (US) and elsewhere.

In Germany, the ruling class turned to fascism – open terroristic dictatorship in the service of monopoly capital – to destroy the communist challenge and divide the working class movement. This was done partly in preparation for a new imperialist war to re-divide the world in favour of German monopoly capital. Initially, Nazi Germany was able to use the anti-Sovietism of the ruling classes of other imperialist countries to strengthen its own economic and military position.

In Britain, France, Spain, the US, China and elsewhere, communists led the fight during the 1930s to build a working class united front as the basis for a wider people's front against fascism.

The Soviet government and the international communist and working class movement were able to use the divisions within imperialism – chiefly between bourgeois democracy and fascism – to prevent a united front of the main imperialist powers against the Soviet Union. This made possible the defeat of fascism in what became a war of people's liberation.

The Second World War (1939-45) also marked the emergence of the US as the world's leading imperialist power. It had already established its own colonies and semi-colonies in Asia and Central and South America.

The ability of the enlarged socialist bloc to ensure full employment and basic social provisions strengthened the determination of people in the capitalist world not to return to pre-war economic conditions. State-monopoly capitalism was compelled to establish or extend welfare and education systems. In Britain, for instance, essential industries and services were nationalised in order to ensure investment, economic growth and full employment. State-monopoly capitalism was rebuilt in West Germany and the basis laid for its rapid development in Japan.

Thus imperialism entered its second phase in the late 1940s, characterised nationally and internationally by the stabilisation and restructuring of capitalism. This was achieved largely through the use of capitalist state power to regulate economic demand, promote profitability and coordinate international trading and currency relations.

Capitalism's productive forces grew at an unprecedented rate in the 1950s and 1960s, largely due to the scientific and technological revolution (STR) with its wide-scale application of computer and micro-

electronic technology. The research and education needed to underpin the STR could only be organised and financed through substantial state involvement. The transnational corporations became the decisive monopolies of imperialism. In the pursuit of maximum global profit, their decisions – which sectors and markets to expand, which to contract, which productive forces to develop, which to make redundant – determined the fate not only of workforces but of whole communities, regions and nations.

Inter-imperialist rivalry was moderated by the common purpose of waging the Cold War against the Soviet Union and its allies – hence the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 1949 – and 'hot war' in Korea and Vietnam.

Most colonies gained at least formal political independence during the post-war era. But the main imperialist powers retained a large measure of economic control through the operations of their TNCs and through such international bodies as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Wherever possible, pro-imperialist regimes were installed in the semi- and ex-colonies across the world, and brutal force was used to crush progressive, left-wing and anti-imperialist movements.

The uneven economic and political development of capitalism was aggravated on a global scale by imperialist intervention and the operations of the TNCs. While capitalism grew rapidly in the newly industrialised countries of the Far East, for example, large parts of Africa and South America fell further behind in economic and social development. Western imperialism ruthlessly plundered their natural resources, exploited their labour and plunged them into debt bondage.

In the leading capitalist economies, the prolonged period of post-war expansion – made possible by state intervention, the STR and rising productivity – was based on a strategy of 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. But cyclical and structural crises reasserted themselves more markedly from the late 1960s. In 1973, the international oil crisis exacerbated one such cyclical downturn and at the same time signalled the onset of today's gathering energy and ecological crisis.

Finance capital was confronted with rising prices, working class pressure to maintain living standards, military and political reverses in the Third World (the under-developed and developing countries) and the continuing political and technological challenge from the socialist countries. Moreover, the international monetary system disintegrated in the 1970s, as the main imperialist powers sought competitive advantage through currency devaluation. Speculators contributed to the instability.

In these conditions, the ideologists, economists and politicians of the 'New Right' gained ascendancy in US and British ruling class circles. Their aim was to restore

and increase the profitability of monopoly capital through a wide-ranging onslaught against real wages, trade unionism, public and welfare services, progressive taxation, public ownership of industry and the utilities, and against banking and financial regulation. Thus imperialism began the transition to a third phase of development from the early 1980s.

Counter-revolution and the dismantling of socialism in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union from the late 1980s opened up enormous opportunities for monopoly capital to seize control of resources, transportation routes, utilities and markets in the former socialist countries and the Third World.

The result has been a prolonged and continuing world-wide imperialist offensive to maximise monopoly profit through 'neoliberal' policies of privatisation, deregulation, intensified exploitation of labour and the free movement of capital. This imperialist 'globalisation' is presented by its supporters and apologists as an inevitable economic process. However, from the outset it has been driven politically by the representatives of state-monopoly capitalism.

New and existing international agencies and mechanisms such as the World Trade Organisation, the General Agreement on Trade in Services, the IMF and the World Bank are utilised to enforce neoliberal policies. The European Union (EU) has played a leading role in this process, confirming its character as an alliance led by the most powerful state-monopoly capitalisms. It strives to overcome internal contradictions and transform itself into an imperialist 'United States of Europe'.

The champions of capitalist 'globalisation' seek to confront workers with two options: either yield to its logic of lower wages, intensified labour and permanent job insecurity – and hope to stay in work – or defy it, with allegedly dire consequences personally and for the nation's economy.

Third World and former socialist countries whose regimes may obstruct imperialist power are demonised as 'rogue' or 'failed' states, often on the basis of racist presumptions. They are accused of frustrating the will of the 'international community' (which usually means the US and its allies). Consequently, bombing missions or full-scale military invasions have been launched against Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia and Yugoslavia.

Moreover, the September 2001 attacks on the US were used as the pretext to launch a bogus 'war on terror'. US, British and NATO forces extended and deepened imperialism's military, political and economic influence across the 'Greater Middle East' region, from North Africa to Pakistan, inflicting state terrorism on the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq on a monstrous scale. The world's biggest reserves of oil, along with vital supply routes, are located in this area, which is strategically located between China, India, Russia and the African continent.

Far from the downfall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War producing a more peaceful world, the imperialist powers led by the US and Britain have since engaged in a massive escalation of armaments

programmes, a non-stop series of military interventions and the expansion of NATO eastwards towards the borders of Russia. China is almost completely surrounded by imperialist military alliances and bases, while foregoing any bases of its own on foreign territory.

A SYSTEM OF CONTRADICTIONS AND CRISES

The whole history and experience of capitalism demonstrates that it is a system of crises and contradictions. The most fundamental, insoluble contradiction of capitalism is that between the social character of production – how society's goods and services are produced and distributed in a vast network across society – and the private character of its ownership and control.

The economy's productive forces are organised together in a complex, inter-dependent system on which society as a whole is based. Yet under capitalism, these forces are mostly owned or controlled by a small minority of the population – the main capitalist shareholders – who direct them to serve their own narrow individual and class interests, rather than the needs of society as a whole.

In their drive to maximise market share and profit, capitalist employers fight to raise productivity and hold down wages. The same drive also takes place in the public sector in order to minimise taxation of private sector profits and wages.

Here is the primary economic basis for the class struggle: between the monopoly capitalists and their state striving to maximise profit on the one side, and the whole working class striving to maximise wages and improve living standards on the other.

Yet working class purchasing power needs to be maintained if capitalism's commodities are all to be sold at a profit. This becomes increasingly difficult when economic growth turns into boom, as capitalists fight to expand sales, production and profits.

Increasing wages might ease the situation, but this eats into profits and only spurs the capitalists to boost production still further. An expansion of private credit or public expenditure might maintain demand in the economy for a limited time, but it has to be paid for as production continues to grow.

So the point is reached where the working class cannot afford to buy all of capitalism's commodities at prices which sustain profitability. Capitalist growth invariably ends in a crisis of 'over-production'. Commodities can no longer be sold at a profit and companies begin to cut back on production and investment, causing a slowdown or recession. Workers are laid off, further depressing demand in the economy. Production actually falls – sometimes in a sudden crash – and stagnates in depression.

Society's productive forces are destroyed as premises are closed, plant and machinery scrapped and large numbers of workers are forced into unemployment.

In the wake of such crises, the trend to monopoly is reinforced as stronger companies take over weaker ones and increase their own market share. This lays the basis

for the cycle to begin again. It does so on the basis of another contradiction intrinsic to capitalism, between the drive for technological advance and the source of capitalist profit.

As companies innovate and mechanise to compete more effectively against each other, so the source of fresh surplus value in the economy as a whole – living labour power – occupies a smaller share of the production process. This depresses the general rate of profit. In order to counteract this tendency, capitalism searches perpetually for cheaper labour and materials, higher levels of productivity, new profit-making activities and fresh markets for its products.

This reinforces the tendency of the most ruthless big capitalists to subject oppressed sections of society – women, black workers and immigrant labour – to super-exploitation at work, using them to undermine workers' terms, conditions and trade union strength.

THE GENERAL CRISIS OF CAPITALISM

The inherent contradictions of capitalism have intensified and broadened. Their consequences have become more serious during the imperialist era.

They embrace not only the economic but also the social, cultural and political spheres of capitalist society. For much of the 20th century, communists therefore referred to the all-round 'general crisis of capitalism'.

Its chief features were identified as:

- The fatal sharpening of capitalism's contradictions (notably in relation to the new role of the state, the stagnation and growing instability of the economy and the deepening of 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.
- The emerging challenge from the forces of socialism led by the Soviet Union and the international socialist system.

This concept of 'general crisis' underestimated the capacity of state-monopoly capitalism to overcome crises, to withstand the socialist challenge, maintain exploitation abroad through neo-colonialism, launch and sustain the STR and retain political, ideological and cultural dominance. It also over-estimated, from the late 1950s, the achievements of the socialist countries and their potential for immediate economic development.

Counter-revolution in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe temporarily reinvigorated capitalism ideologically, politically and, to a lesser extent, economically. This masked capitalism's general crisis for a short time, yet its objective features remain. Indeed, they have returned to full view with a vengeance.

On the economic front, for instance, recent regional and global crises have assumed a substantially, and even predominantly, financial character. This reflects the increasingly parasitic nature of monopoly finance capital.

The liberalisation of financial markets from the 1980s led to a huge boom in trading. The development of global 24-hour financial, currency and commodity markets facilitated an explosion of speculation in stocks, shares, currencies, commodities and financial instruments of every kind. Sharp imbalances, shocks and raids have since precipitated severe crises, not only in the financial world but in the productive economy. Bankers, speculators and asset strippers in the City of London enjoyed lax regulation, attractive financial 'products', a favourable tax regime and easy access to tax havens under British protection.

In Britain and the US, the huge bubble in capital values based on insecure and fraudulent financial securities and derivatives, linked to debt and risk, burst in late 2007. The private, household and government debt that had maintained economic demand dried up, making the postponed cyclical downturn in the real productive economy all the sharper and more sudden.

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. Yet, immediately afterwards, those same governments and central banks utterly failed to mobilise politically and financially to rescue public services and socially useful jobs, or even to introduce stricter national and international regulation of the financial system. Instead, from 2008, mass unemployment returned to the record post-war levels of the early 1980s.

Clearly, the world's major capitalist powers are unable or unwilling to control the immense anarchic, parasitical, anti-social financial forces unleashed by capitalist globalisation. Since the disintegration of the post-war system of international regulation, all attempts to construct a new financial and economic settlement have failed.

Thus the insoluble contradictions of capitalist production have become combined with, and aggravated by, the deep contradictions of capitalist exchange on a global scale. Together, they constitute the permanent structural crisis in the economic base of capitalist society.

The combined economic and financial crisis that commenced in 2007 also confirmed the tendency to synchronisation between the main capitalist economies. Capitalist 'globalisation' has made it more difficult for one major economy to grow out of crisis at the expense of others.

For Third World countries, crisis in the imperialist countries drags them down too, while most of the benefits of recovery and expansion are reaped by the TNCs. Monopoly capital uses state power to enforce its interests against rival imperialists and against Third World peoples through super-exploitation, trade inequality, war and forced mass migration. This reality illustrates another fundamental contradiction of capitalism: between imperialism's incessant drive for domination at home and abroad, and humanity's aspirations for peace, national self-determination and a

civilised society. This contradiction has been highlighted by the fact that, while imperialism has used the crisis as an opportunity for super-exploitation of the Third World, China has become a major engine of world growth, not least in the developing countries.

The disparities in economic and social development between nations and whole regions of the world have increased over the past 20 years. This is the product of capitalist economic anarchy – where no effective economic planning takes place above the level of the individual enterprise or conglomerate – combined with the unequal distribution of monopoly and state power between the imperialist countries and the rest.

Capitalism's structural economic crisis has also produced a structural crisis of distribution on a world scale.

More than a billion of the Earth's seven billion people are severely undernourished or starving. Food production and distribution is organised by TNCs in order to maximise profits in the most lucrative markets, while Third World governments enslaved by debt collaborate in 'cash crop' farming, which leaves their own populations poor and hungry. Meanwhile, the EU routinely destroys mountains of food produced by subsidised agriculture in order to maintain prices and profits.

Hundreds of millions of adults and children have no access to medical services and a similar number – the majority of them women – are illiterate.

More than one billion people lack access to safe drinking water and sanitation, causing millions more deaths every year from preventable disease. Water and other energy resources that could be harnessed for those in direst need are instead exploited, diverted or neglected by capitalist monopolies seeking maximum profit.

Another dimension of capitalism's general crisis has come to the fore in recent decades, one which threatens the very future of the human race. Capitalism's rapacious, short-term drive to maximise monopoly profit now endangers our global environment and eco-system.

The continuing growth in carbon emissions plays the main part in heating up the Earth, melting the polar ice-caps, raising sea levels, spreading desertification, disrupting weather patterns and destabilising some of the most vulnerable societies on our planet. Yet big business and the major capitalist powers refuse to take the drastic steps necessary to curb emissions, for fear of curtailing monopoly profits. Instead, they use sanctions, military intervention and compliant local dictatorships to maintain access to oil supplies.

Until and unless global warming is halted, many more people will join what are already some of the biggest forced migrations in human history, as millions flee the famines and resource wars inflicted on their homelands by imperialist super-exploitation and military intervention.

The depletion of finite resources such as coal, oil and natural gas, without the planned development of renewable alternatives, confronts humanity with the prospect of catastrophic energy shortages within a generation or two.

Yet instead of investing massively in alternative, safe and renewable energy generation and distribution, the EU promotes carbon emission trading schemes. These enable the industrial and financial monopolies to trade licences to pollute for profit, while shifting dirtier production to the developing countries when not limiting their industrialisation altogether.

Capitalism's social crisis afflicts countries at every level of development. Almost everywhere, social inequality has widened over recent decades. The alienation of people from their local community and society – especially young people denied prospects and opportunities – has grown, together with associated problems of drug abuse, crime and anti-social behaviour.

In the sphere of politics, big business influence has nurtured naked careerism, hypocrisy and corruption. Large numbers of people in the advanced capitalist 'democracies' – especially among the working class – have turned away from bourgeois politics. This is reflected in declining levels of participation in political parties, together with higher levels of scepticism and hostility towards professional politicians.

At the same time, people will still mobilise in large numbers around issues relating to local services, unemployment, the environment, peace and racism.

Ideologically, while people's confidence in any viable alternative to capitalism was shaken across the world by the downfall of the Soviet Union, critical and antagonistic attitudes to capitalism continue to be widespread and have even increased in the wake of the post-2007 crisis.

The liberating potential of artistic and cultural activities for working class people, both as producers and as consumers, is continually undermined by capitalist ownership and power. Capitalism increasingly produces 'culture' as it does other commodities – for sale and at a profit or not at all – regardless of social need or the social good. 'Popular culture' is thereby turned into a commercial, conservative force that promotes ideas of selfishness, greed and individualism. Monopoly capitalist society is one in which the price of everything is proclaimed, while the real value of things to society as a whole is denied or distorted.

There is little in capitalist mass-produced 'culture' that reflects the real experience, collectiveness and creativity of working class life, past or present.

New technology such as the internet can be used extensively by progressives and revolutionaries in the interests of human liberation. But capitalist ownership and state control also strive to promote it for the purposes of mass trivialisation and diversion, as well as for military and security projects that endanger everyone.

Economically, socially, politically and culturally, capitalism has long ceased to play a progressive role in human development. It does not lack dynamism in its quest for maximum profit, but this imperative of capitalist development threatens every aspect of humanity. Capitalism's general crisis is society's general crisis, as much in Britain as anywhere else. ●

2 State-monopoly capitalism in Britain

STATE-MONOPOLY CAPITALISM is constructed and run to serve the interests of the ruling class. It is essential to understand the core composition and strategy of this class if its rule is to be challenged successfully.

In particular, the policies of recent governments in Britain demonstrate how ruling class interests are served and with what consequences for the economy, social justice, democracy, peace and the planet's eco-system.

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 20th century and into the 21st, the limits of social democracy have become evident, demonstrating again and again that socialism remains the only real, fundamental alternative to capitalism.

THE RULING CLASS AND ITS STRATEGY

Over the past century, the capitalist state in Britain has increasingly been subordinated to the needs of finance capital rather than to those of the capitalist class as a whole. Indeed, the British state today creates a substantial proportion of the economic demand, bond-trading business and overseas investment opportunities on which finance capital depends for its profits.

Although Britain has tens of thousands of small firms, the dominant position in each sector of industry and services is usually held by no more than five or six big firms. They control the technology, monopolise access to export markets and use their market power to subordinate the smaller firms which act as suppliers, subcontractors and distributors.

These monopolies, whether public limited companies or private equity ventures, are invariably controlled by financial institutions. Banks and insurance companies own the dominant blocks of shares and use their power to buy and sell in order to extract maximum short-term profit.

Those who own and control the big financial companies, and through them control the major non-financial monopolies, thereby constitute the core of the Britain's ruling capitalist class. This relatively small group of finance capitalists organise the economy to maximise monopoly profits at home and imperialist 'super-profits' around the world. They largely dictate the key domestic and foreign policies adopted and implemented by the British state apparatus, whose structures and top personnel interlock with those of the capitalist monopolies.

Thus the Thatcher government's de-control of capital movements and financial markets enabled the City of London to become the world centre for

deregulated speculation in currencies, stocks, shares and financial derivatives.

After three decades of 'neoliberal' economic policies, the British economy is more dominated than ever by banking and financial services. Meanwhile, four million manufacturing jobs have been lost and many new jobs in the service sector are low-paid, temporary, part-time and insecure.

Increasingly, the City's power and influence is shared by United States (US) finance capital. Until the late 1980s, most of the dominant financial institutions in the City of London were British-owned. Now, the majority of the investment banks (including their private equity funds) are US-owned. A smaller number are German, French or Swiss, alongside the remaining British investment banks. National ownership became clear during the banking crisis, when each state saved its own country's banks. Middle East and Far East state-run sovereign wealth funds also own a growing proportion of stocks and shares in Britain, as they do in the US.

Large sections of British industry have also passed into the hands of overseas transnational corporations (TNCs), notably in energy, steel, cement, chemicals, ports, airports and the mass media. The private sector services undermining the National Health Service (NHS) and Royal Mail are mostly in foreign ownership. Most of Britain's high-technology production in computing, electronics, machine tools, cars and consumer durables is conducted by externally-owned TNCs.

British-owned monopolies are now restricted to a fairly narrow range of areas: finance, oil, gas, mining, retail, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, food and tobacco and arms manufacture. These areas reflect the colonial and neo-colonial orientation of Britain's economy. In most cases, the bulk of their investment is outside Britain, earning super-profits on the back of cheap labour.

In fact, the British capitalist class owns more economic and financial assets outside its home territory than the capitalist class of any other country except the US. A large proportion of its new investment – in some years more than half – is carried out overseas, through TNCs and the City of London, rather than in Britain.

A top priority of the British ruling class is to ensure that finance capital's profit-making capacity does not suffer as a consequence of the post-2007 economic and financial crisis.

This means that the burden of narrowing Britain's public budget deficit must be made to fall mainly on public services, public sector workers and the mass of working class taxpayers, not on the wealthy and big business.

New profit-making possibilities in the public sector mean that health, education, social housing and even the prison system are being thrown open to private capital through privatisation and similar policies. Slashing workers' pension entitlements in these areas prior to privatisation is an essential part of this process. So, too, is a new round of attacks on trade union and employment rights.

Narrowing the public sector financial deficit through huge social spending cuts is important if British state-monopoly capitalism is to maintain the credibility of sterling and the position of the City of London as a leading financial centre.

British finance capital intends to maintain its freedom to operate through the City with minimum regulation and taxation, helping to ensure that the growing challenge from other financial centres in Europe, Asia and the Middle East is minimised. At the same time, US finance capital is using its position in the City as the springboard for deeper penetration across Europe.

Internationally, Britain's monopoly capitalists want to:

- Compete more effectively against rivals within the European Union (EU), especially in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.
- Continue expanding in US markets, strengthening British monopoly capital's stake in US foreign policy.
- Protect their investments from the threat of regulation and nationalisation in Latin America.
- Extend their interests in the 'Greater Middle East' region with its enormous oil and gas reserves and vital trade routes.
- Defend substantial economic and political positions in Africa, against rival imperialisms and the rising influence of socialist China.

The British ruling class therefore wish to see British influence maintained and extended both within the EU and as a junior partner with US imperialism, acting as far as possible to reduce the potential for conflict between the EU and the US.

They regard it a top priority in the 21st century to participate in the extension of US military power and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) across the 'Greater Middle East'; and into the regions surrounding Russia, India and especially China, in order to contain and exert pressure on emerging economic, political and military powers. Maintaining Britain's nuclear weapons and a permanent seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council are seen as essential to pursuing these strategic objectives.

In common with its counterparts in the US and other developed countries, British state-monopoly capitalism also seeks to place the main burden for combating global warming on the developing countries through unfairly distributed quotas which can then be undermined by carbon emission trading schemes.

In pursuing this ruling class strategy internationally and at home, 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 some important economic and social questions, despite the pro-monopoly, pro-imperialist orientation of the Labour Party leadership.

SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND OPPRESSION

Britain has become one of the most unequal societies in the developed world in terms of income and wealth, housing, diet, health, and employment and educational opportunities.

At the root of this social inequality is the system of capitalist exploitation itself. In return for providing society's goods and services, workers rely mostly on their wages to sustain themselves and their families (many of which are rearing the next generation of workers or caring for the previous one). Many parents and carers depend on state benefits or pensions – the 'social wage' – funded from taxes on the wages and profits generated by the working class.

All forms of working class income have come under increasing pressure in recent decades. Traditionally, capitalism has depended on large-scale unemployment to weaken trade union organisation and bargaining strength. Most significantly, therefore, the British ruling class opted in the late 1970s to ditch the 1944 White Paper commitment to full employment and begin dismantling the welfare state. A range of techniques and strategies was developed to maximise profit at the expense of working class income, including casualisation, flexible working, privatisation, deregulation, 'pension holidays' and debt bondage.

As exploitation intensified, so the gap between working people and the super-rich has widened enormously. In Britain today, the richest 10 per cent of the population own around half of all declared personal wealth, while the poorer 50 per cent of the population own less than one-tenth of it.

Moreover, capitalism has always utilised differences of gender, ethnicity, education, skill and mental and physical disability to divide the labour force and drive down the level of real wages.

In Britain, most women workers are still paid less than many men for doing work of equal value. Black and ethnic minority labour is used to fill many of the jobs with low pay and minimal training and promotion opportunities. In particular, TNCs seek to employ young and migrant workers as casual or short-term labour on inferior terms and conditions, often to undermine collective agreements reached with trade unions. This super-exploitation has been enshrined in law by EU legal judgements and directives.

It is also reinforced by sexist, racist and anti-

foreigner attitudes. In an imperialist country with a history of empire, such as Britain, racist ideas are deeply rooted and can be manipulated by the ruling class as well as by right-wing nationalist or fascist movements. Social inequalities of class and race can be further exacerbated by capitalism's uneven development and structural crises in the regions and nations of Britain.

All these disparities of income and wellbeing among working people are, therefore, the direct result of the way capital extracts surplus value by fragmenting and segregating labour and exploiting existing oppressions. This process ensures that in every generation many more people will face homelessness, insecurity and poverty.

All such inequalities can be utilised to divide people. The erosion of the welfare state has meant that all these divisions have become more entrenched over the past 30 years. At the same time, the struggle to reduce, if not eliminate, inequality has the potential not only for promoting unity within the working class, but also for drawing in those people from the intermediate strata (many self-employed, small traders and farmers, senior managers, etc.) who also experience or oppose inequality, prejudice, discrimination and oppression.

DEMOCRACY AND THE STATE

Communists have long understood that the state is an apparatus for the rule of one class over the others in society. This remains the case even though it may mediate between competing sections of the ruling class, or organise concessions to the subordinate classes. It is not, therefore, 'neutral' or above the class struggle. Where the ruling class cannot achieve consent for its system or policies, it will use the coercive power of the state to enforce its interests.

But the struggle to win economic and social reforms under capitalism not only improves conditions for the working class, for as long as the reforms can be maintained. It also raises confidence, expectations and demands. Thus political understanding can grow about the class nature of society, class rule and the need to fight to change it.

Achieving democratic rights of assembly, combination, publication and election for workers, trade unions, political parties and other campaigning organisations creates the most favourable conditions for winning reforms and raising political consciousness.

Through the long campaigns for the People's Charter in the 19th century and for votes for women into the 20th century, the British ruling class opposed electoral democracy. It feared that if the majority who possessed no capital secured the vote, they would use it collectively in their class interest. The working class movement fought with the understanding that the vote would enable the organised majority to counteract the massive economic power concentrated in the hands of the monopoly capitalists. The aim would be to establish a real 'social democracy' that went beyond political democracy, to achieve social ownership of the means of production. This understanding was originally expressed in the choice of name for the Labour Party.

Conversely, ever since the 1920s, when it was forced to concede full formal democracy, the British ruling class has sought to make it 'unconstitutional' for organised labour to use its own collective strength politically. Ceaselessly, this ruling class has sought to redefine democracy in individual terms that leave all those without capital at the mercy of the concentrated economic power of those who have it.

In recent decades, the ruling class has made deep inroads into the democratic rights and liberties previously won by the working class and peoples of Britain.

The Tory governments of the 1980s and 1990s enacted a barrage of anti-trade union laws and abolished the layer of metropolitan local government where the Conservatives received little electoral support. The police, security services and the courts were used ruthlessly to limit rights of protest.

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

But the powers and resources granted to the new devolved bodies in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and London were kept to a minimum, in order to limit their potential to enact policies that could challenge the interests of monopoly capital. Similarly, proposals for regional government in England were drained of any real democratic content. They turned into measures for bureaucratic reorganisation, threatening the already meagre powers of local councils.

New Labour introduced limited reforms to expand trade union rights, but refused to repeal the vicious anti-union laws of the Thatcher period. As a result, trade union rights have since been blocked and undermined by employers' use of the courts and judges by employers to overturn democratic ballots for industrial action. A series of judgements at the European (EU) Court of Justice threaten negotiated agreements and national legislation that protect workers' terms and conditions.

The New Labour governments introduced repressive new laws to target scapegoats held responsible for social problems and to suppress the growing opposition to government policies. Huge holes were punched in longstanding civil liberties including rights to peaceful protest and freedom from detention without charge or trial. The powers of the police, 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, while Muslims were demonised as part of the bogus 'war on terror'.

New Labour also embraced the use of military state power to promote monopoly capitalism 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.

In 2010, the incoming Tory-Liberal Democrat government scrapped plans to introduce a universal identity card system, which would have given the police and other state authorities enormous potential to limit the individual civil liberties of every member of the population. This was in order to focus its anti-democratic drive on collective rights, notably those to demonstrate, to influence and enact policies through elected local government and to defend workers' interests through trade union representation and industrial action.

Such developments can best be understood against the background of ruling class strategy with its offensive against people's living standards, public services and the welfare state. This offensive has been greatly intensified in the wake of the post-2007 capitalist crisis.

It is a strategy that illustrates the division of interests between British state-monopoly capitalism and those of working people – from managers and research scientists to shop-floor workers – and all who depend upon economic growth within Britain.

THE LIMITS OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

In Britain, Germany, France, Sweden, Australia and other developed countries, Labour and 'socialist' parties and governments have attempted to reform capitalism in the interests of the working class rather than take the road to socialism. Instead, they have revised 'social democracy' to mean social progress for all within the confines of the capitalist system.

In Britain, the post-1945 welfare state helped masses of people to escape destitution and avoidable ill health. But it has proved vulnerable to frequent cuts and privatisation. Progressive taxation – based on people's ability to pay – has provided extra funds for public services and achieved some redistribution of wealth, although the latter has since been reversed as the result of policies demanded by powerful vested interests.

Public ownership of coal, steel, the railways, electricity, gas, water, public transport, the ports, telecommunications and aerospace ensured enormous investment in basic industries, resources and services in the second half of the 20th century. But these have been programmes of capitalist nationalisation, usually carried out in order to rescue or develop vital industries that the capitalists cannot run at sufficient profit. Such state ownership on behalf of the capitalist class has invariably involved high levels of 'compensation' for previous private owners, subsidised prices and lucrative contracts for the private sector, little or no parliamentary accountability and no power for workers in economic decision-making.

Whether separately or together, the welfare state, progressive taxation, public ownership and economic planning do not amount to socialism. They have brought real benefits to the working class as well to the

capitalists, the intermediate strata and society as a whole. They even provide a glimpse of socialism's potential. But they have not put an end to capitalist exploitation and the vast inequalities it creates. Only socialism will do that. They also indicate the limits to collectivism and planning in what remains a capitalist economy and system of society.

In the main imperialist countries, the failure of social-democratic governments to challenge monopoly capital at home has also been reflected in their foreign and military policies, where they have continued to promote the interests of their own country's monopoly capitalists, even to the point of military intervention.

Invariably, social democracy has ended up capitulating to monopoly capital, abandoning its most radical policies and turning on sections of its own supporters in an effort to stabilise, manage or modernise the capitalist economy.

In every case, labour and socialist parties and governments in capitalist countries have had no effective theory and programme to guide them. Their outlook is not based on a Marxist, class-based understanding of how capitalism works and where and when it is most vulnerable. Consequently, social democracy has had no strategy for progressive advance and socialist revolution. Conference policies and election manifestos have been confused with the development of a programme for far-reaching change. Government office has been mistaken for state power. Moreover, once in office, social democracy has never had any notion of involving and mobilising the working class and its allies beyond elections, of drawing them into extra-parliamentary action to defend the government and help implement progressive, anti-monopoly policies.

Overall, capitalism has had a more profound impact on social democracy than vice-versa. In the first imperialist phase of rising monopoly, imperialist war and revolution, many mass workers' parties achieved office, but on terms set by the ruling class. Out of splits and divisions came the communist parties. In the second phase, after 1945, social-democratic governments administered, reformed and strengthened state-monopoly capitalism in return for abandoning the aim of socialism. Now, in the new third phase, some parties or leaderships have embraced 'neoliberal' economic and social policies, although the battle of ideas within them continues, between the neoliberal, social democratic and socialist trends.

This degeneration of social democracy, alongside ruling class propaganda to identify its failures with socialism, makes it more necessary than ever to restate the case for socialism, as it applies to modern society. ●

3 The case for socialism

THE URGENCY GROWS to lift people out of hunger, poverty, sickness and ignorance. Our planet's eco-system 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, health care and education for all.

Indeed, never before in history have the rapid advances in science and technology provided such opportunities for the all-round development of every human being.

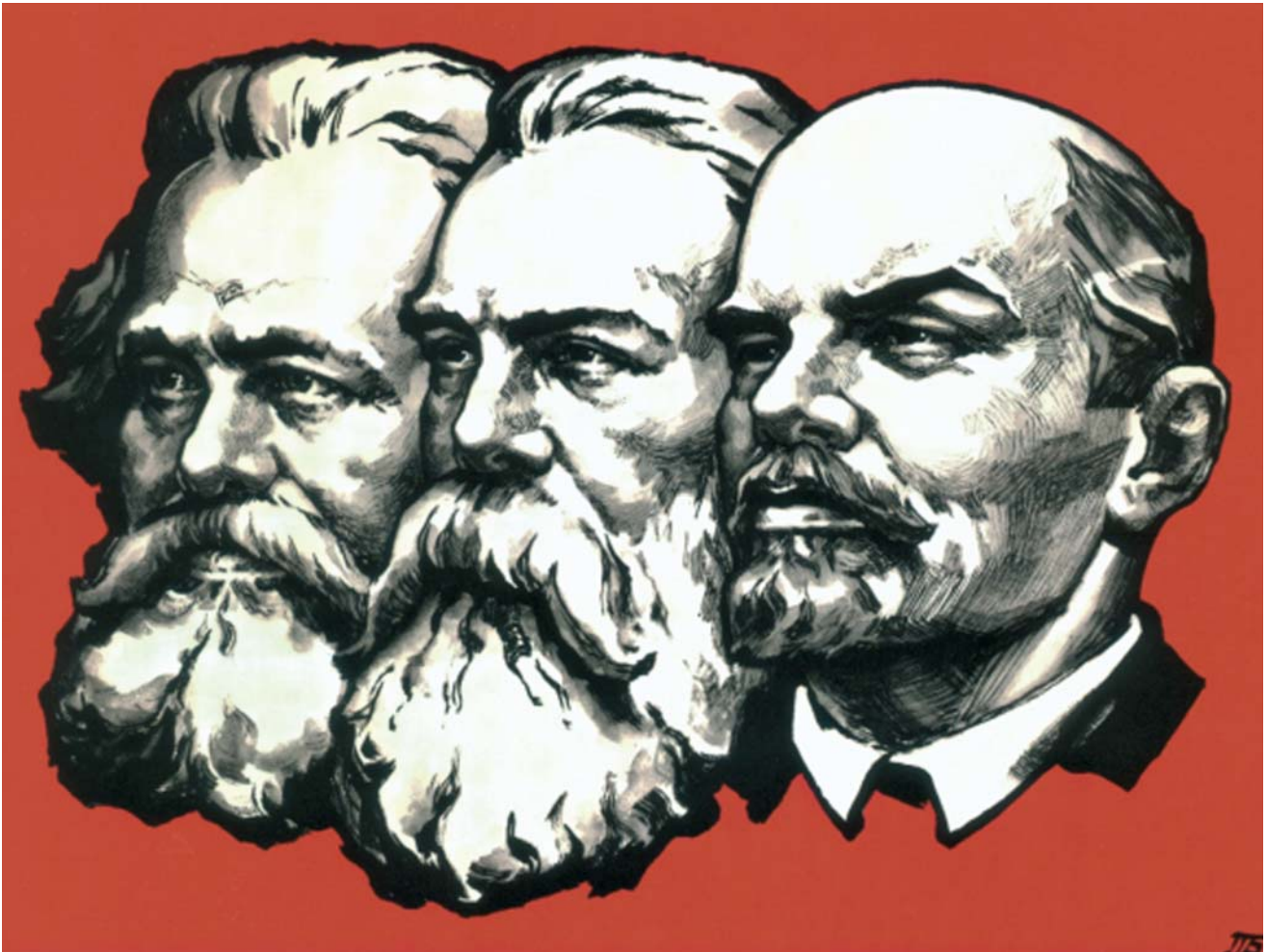
But while it has proved possible, from time to time, to curb capitalism's tendencies to crisis, deprivation and war, those tendencies have always reasserted themselves because they arise from the nature of the capitalist system itself. The capitalist economic cycle produces

gluts, crises, cut-backs, redundancies and then shortages before beginning all over again.

The anarchy of the capitalist economy in general militates against society's need for planned, balanced, equitable and sustainable development across countries, regions and the whole world.

Nonetheless, the experience of social-democratic policies and the attempts so far to build socialism – albeit in very different conditions to those in Britain – provide some valuable lessons.

They demonstrate, for instance, that public ownership, economic planning, collective provision and the redistribution of wealth can provide substantial economic, social and cultural benefits to the mass of the population, even when these are restricted, distorted, exploited and subverted by monopoly capitalist interests. Experience also indicates that unless such



policies are mobilised as the basis from which to make deeper inroads into capitalist economic and state power, they will prove to be partial and temporary. Their weaknesses and inadequacies will then be used to discredit any alternative to private capitalist ownership, the 'free' market and social inequality.

After centuries of capitalism, the first attempts to build a socialist society arose fewer than 100 years ago in conditions of world war, in less developed societies facing the advanced, hostile and powerful forces of imperialism. Both the achievements and the failures of these pioneering socialist systems have to be considered in this context, and lessons learnt accordingly.

SOCIALISM – THE LESSONS SO FAR

During its near 70-year existence, the Soviet Union showed how socialist state power, planning and public ownership could transform society in the interests of the mass of the population.

The Bolsheviks and their allies took state power in Russia in 1917 and used it to withdraw from the imperialist war and defeat counter-revolutionary forces. Fourteen foreign armies, including those of Britain, the United States (US) and Poland, invaded Russia in 1918 to 'strangle Bolshevism in its cradle', in the words of Winston Churchill. This imperialist ambition to destroy Soviet power was to continue through most of the 20th century.

Nevertheless, 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 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 world-wide campaign of lies and distortions aimed at the Soviet Union, the international communist movement and the concept of socialism.

Yet central organisation and rapid, massive industrialisation enabled the Soviet Red Army to smash Hitler's war machine, halt the Nazi genocide and

liberate much of Europe from fascism,

Following World War Two, the US Marshall Plan financed the rebuilding of capitalist economies in western Europe. The Soviet Union, with 26 million dead and much of its land and productive capacity destroyed, was left to its own devices.

The Soviets once again constructed a society of full employment, housing, public transport and high-quality health and education services for all. This same feat was accomplished in the newly socialist countries of war-ravaged eastern Europe, where the Soviet model of society was promoted in both its positive and negative aspects.

At the same time, the socialist countries launched programmes of solidarity with progressive and national liberation movements around the world that operated over three decades.

But under pressure from the arms race launched by the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the Soviet bureaucratic-command system was unable to utilise the full fruits of the scientific and technological revolution (STR) beyond the military, space and medical fields. From the mid-1970s, economic growth in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe began to fall behind that of the most advanced capitalist countries, notably Japan and West Germany. 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 super-exploitation of the Third World.

While women participated more extensively in politics, science, education and employment than their counterparts in capitalist society, they encountered limits to their promotion. Some professions lost their status as women came to predominate in them. National autonomy in party, state and cultural affairs was limited in practice by centralised control.

The increasing failure to mobilise the party, the working class and the people to solve these and other economic, social and political problems led eventually to stagnation and political collapse in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, from 1989. Significantly, there were no mass movements to defend the socialist system against counter-revolution.

Yet the weaknesses and failures of the Soviet model of socialism have since been overtaken by the calamities of capitalist restoration. Public economic property has passed into the hands of Western TNCs, state bureaucrats and home-grown gangsters. Millions of workers have lost their jobs, pensions and trade union rights. Public and welfare services have collapsed. The peoples of the former Soviet Union experienced the biggest reductions in life expectancy ever recorded. National and ethnic differences have exploded into terrorism and war. In some countries, the brutal trafficking and sexual exploitation of women is widespread.

Determined not to experience counter-revolution and its consequences, China's communists have placed great emphasis on economic and social development. State power is being used to combine economic

planning and public ownership with private capital and market mechanisms. The aim is to build a socialist society in its primary stage. Already, state-directed policies have lifted more than 600 million people – almost half the population – out of extreme poverty since 1981, a feat unequalled in history.

The foreign policy of the People's Republic of China has sought to uphold the principles of national sovereignty and peaceful co-existence, while carrying out foreign investment policies that also benefit host countries substantially.

Yet, as the Communist Party of China (CPC) itself acknowledges, problems in Chinese society of social inequality, the lack of universal welfare provisions, corruption and underdeveloped trade unionism need to be further addressed and rectified. Advances have been made in extending democratic rights without the CPC weakening its leading role in political life. The importance of renewing democracy inside the party and in wider society should not be underestimated.

The Cuban model of socialism seeks to involve the masses of people in the defence of national sovereignty against US imperialist subversion, mobilising them also to solve economic, social and environmental problems. The result is a society with the most advanced health and education services in the Third World, bold policies to expand food production and minimise carbon emissions and an internationalist foreign policy to assist oppressed and disadvantaged peoples around the world. Most recently, Cuba has embarked upon policies to develop and diversify industry and services.

The experience of communists and socialists attempting to build socialism indicates the importance of mobilising wide support for progressive and revolutionary change, making inroads into the economic and political power of the monopoly capitalists, taking the bold steps necessary from government office to state power, exerting popular sovereignty and involving the mass of the people at every stage in the revolutionary process, including the exercise of political power.

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 if those differing national conditions are taken fully into account.

History also demonstrates that taking state power and beginning to construct a socialist society can occur in one or more countries at a time, reflecting the reality of uneven economic and political development under capitalism. This explodes the abstract and defeatist myth that socialist revolution can only be a single-stage and wholly or primarily global process.

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP AND PLANNING

For as long as capitalist ownership of the economy exists, whether or not the so-called 'free market' is dominated by monopolies, its operations will produce

crisis, destruction, inequality and waste on an enormous scale.

Capitalism's drive to maximise profit leads it to turn every area of human need – food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, education, sex, leisure – into a market for the production and sale of commodities for profit. However, when sufficient profit cannot be realised, even the products and services to meet society's most vital needs will not be produced.

Capitalist competition invariably means unnecessary duplication, takeovers, 'rationalisation', closures, asset-stripping, commercial secrecy, excessive packaging and large-scale contrivances of style and fashion – all of which represent a waste, limitation or destruction of society's productive resources. Whole economic sectors have developed – advertising, property management, business consultancy – that perform little or no useful function in society, except to promote the interests of monopoly capital and, ultimately, to transfer income to it from the working class and intermediate strata.

The reality of monopoly power is that it is used to block or take over more efficient but smaller competitors, especially those that seek to share the benefits of economic activity more equitably with workers or consumers. Anti-trust, anti-cartel and similar laws have utterly failed to halt the march of the capitalist monopolies towards national and international domination. Breaking up the monopolies, even if achievable, would merely set the clock back for the process to begin again.

Only public ownership of the economy's major sectors and enterprises – the economic essence of socialism – can put an end to monopoly power and fundamentally change the basis on which economic decisions are taken. Pointless and wasteful competition and duplication would be eliminated. The development and deployment of society's productive forces would be planned in order to meet people's real needs and aspirations. Jobs, houses and vital or useful goods and services would be created as the primary purpose of planning and production, not as the incidental consequence of maximising profits for shareholders.

In particular, public ownership is the only viable basis on which energy and public transport can be planned and developed in an integrated way, to combat global warming and climate change while ensuring renewable power supplies.

But fundamental distinctions must be drawn between the different types of public ownership as operated in different stages and conditions.

Democratic or progressive public ownership would be conducted on a fundamentally different basis from capitalist public ownership – in the interests of the working class and the people, not of monopoly capital. A left government would seek to extend it to viable enterprises and sectors, with compensation paid primarily to pension funds and small investors and on the basis of proven need. Its pricing, contracting and investment policies would be consistent with the priorities, needs and interests of society as a whole. Its

administration would be democratically accountable to the elected representatives of the people at every level, with workers and local communities fully involved in decision-making.

Socialist public ownership would be based on the same approach, but after the achievement of state power. It would be carried out in all major sectors of industry and commerce in the drive to end monopoly capitalist wealth and power and build a socialist society based on democratic and, where necessary, centralised economic planning.

ENDING EXPLOITATION AND OPPRESSION

Social ownership of economic property puts an end to the exploitation of the working class, whereby surplus labour is performed for the benefit of the capitalist class.

When there is social ownership, surplus labour takes place to meet the needs and aspirations of the working class and society as a whole. This will have to mean that workers and their representatives are fully represented in the economic and political spheres of decision-making, ensuring that surplus labour is not exploited for the benefit of a privileged class or group.

Since society first became divided into classes, the ruling class of the time has used the oppression of sections of the exploited classes to maximise exploitation and reinforce its rule. Under capitalism, the oppression of women, black workers and other groups has reaped super-profits and helped ensure the reproduction of existing class relations economically, ideologically and politically – not least by fomenting or perpetuating divisions within the working class itself.

Such oppression is sustained by sets of prejudicial ideas and assumptions, for example those of sexism and racism. These ideologies apply across class boundaries, affecting members of the oppressed group in every class, although their impact is felt most severely by those in the exploited classes.

Putting an end to capitalist property relations and the exploitation of labour would remove the material basis for social oppression. No class in society would gain from the super-exploitation of any section of the working class, or have the means by which to secure it. The reorientation of priorities in production to meet the needs of the people would further reduce the scope for conflict over scarce provision, whether of jobs, housing, public services or essential goods.

The experience of socialism confirms that prejudice and discrimination on grounds of gender, nationality, sexual orientation, age etc., can survive the abolition of capitalism, at least for a period, weakened but not altogether eliminated. But socialism furnishes the material basis, and therefore the potential, to bring all forms of social oppression to an end.

With the abolition of capitalism, the most powerful forces for the perpetuation of racist, sexist, homophobic and other reactionary attitudes are disarmed, leaving the forces of socialism with the responsibility to consign them to the rubbish heap of history, promoting a culture of equal rights and liberation instead.

DEMOCRACY AND POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

In capitalist society, it is the interests of capital that predominate, regardless of proclamations about the sovereignty of the people or of parliament.

The electoral franchise and other democratic rights are subverted by huge inequalities in wealth and power between different classes and sections of the population. Politicians and political parties are bought or intimidated, issues and debate are distorted by the mass media, the electoral system is often rigged against small, new or left-wing parties, and elected parliaments can be marginalised or dissolved.

The European Union (EU) represents a new model whereby monopoly capital can circumvent democratic representation and accountability. The EU parliament is elected by constituencies so large as to break any meaningful organic link between electors and representatives. It has few powers that it would dare exercise. The fundamental capitalist economic and political character of the EU is set in constitutional concrete. Any real sovereignty is shared between unelected and unaccountable bodies – the Council of Ministers, the EU Commission and the European Central Bank.

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. This revolutionary concept originates in the English Revolution, with the Levellers and the soldiers' parliament, and in the French Revolution with its constituent assembly and constitution. It was also seen in the Paris Commune of 1871, in the workers', peasants' and soldiers' *soviets* (councils) of the 1905 and 1917 Russian revolutions, and in all mass movements against exploitation and oppression.

In Britain today, for example, the struggle to exert popular sovereignty can be seen in the mass movement against imperialist war, in progressive campaigns against EU power and in local broad-based campaigns to defend jobs and public services. But popular sovereignty will only prevail when state power is taken out of the hands of the capitalist class by the working class and its allies, whose interests represent those of the people and society as a whole.

This lays the basis for the active involvement of the people in all aspects of decision-making. Such mass participation is the surest guarantee that democratic rights will be enormously more extensive and more real in a socialist society, free from the distortions of monopoly capital's wealth and power. ●

4 The labour and progressive movements

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?

Any serious strategy for socialist revolution in Britain must identify such forces at each stage of the process, developing policies that meet people's interests and make inroads into capitalist power. The aim must be to maximise the forces for progress and socialist revolution, and minimise those in opposition.

Different classes and sections of society have their own reasons for challenging aspects of monopoly capitalism, even if they do not understand their situation in political or ideological terms. The point is that they share a common enemy which exploits workers here and abroad, oppresses large sections of society, strives constantly to roll back democratic rights, blocks progress on every front, generates militarism and war, and now threatens the viability of our planet.

This enemy, monopoly capitalism, will have to be overthrown because it cannot be fundamentally reformed.

THE LEADING ROLE OF THE WORKING CLASS

The working class has the most direct interest in overthrowing capitalism. After all, this is the system which exploits workers, excludes them from real decision-making in the workplace and in wider society, condemns them to poverty at one or more stages in life, and confines most of them to a lifetime of inequality and insecurity.

At the core of the working class are those engaged in manufacturing, engineering, construction, energy, transport and manual work, who produce commodities directly for capitalist profit. Experience of such unconcealed exploitation, especially in large workplaces, has tended to make them the most class-conscious sections. But administrative and other staff in the public and private sectors are equally part of the working class.

Of course, some workers do not recognise themselves as members of the working class. They believe that they are 'middle class', or that class is defined by the type of job, by professional status, skill, type of residence, personal possessions, accent or social habits. But the reality is that class is defined objectively.

The capitalists derive their main forms of income – profit, interest or rent – from their ownership of economic and financial property (usually in the form of stocks and shares, other financial assets and property deeds).

Some workers may own stocks and shares directly, or indirectly through a pension or other fund. But their chief, if not sole, source of income is their wage. They

depend on their wages to live. Furthermore, what all waged workers also have in common as a class under capitalism is that they are exploited. This includes those in the public sector whose unpaid surplus labour does not directly produce surplus value for capitalist employers, but keeps down the costs of running the capitalist state. Their surplus value is appropriated by the state for the benefit of the capitalist class as a whole, whose interests are served in a variety of ways by the public services provided.

Often, following redundancy, many workers are hired for their labour power by capitalist enterprises as 'self-employed' or through sub-contractors. They, too, produce surplus value for capitalists as though directly employed by them. Moreover, they are further exploited as their de facto 'employer' provides no pension contributions, sickness cover, paid holidays or redundancy pay.

Yet the conditions of capitalist production, trade and administration also create the potential for the working class to liberate itself. Workers are brought together in factories, offices and other workplaces, where they share a common interest in organising to improve their terms and conditions of employment. They form trade unions which express and develop their collective strength as a disciplined force in society.

Trade unions often play a defensive role under capitalism, seeking to protect workers against excessive exploitation, dangerous working conditions, redundancy, bullying and harassment. But they also go on the offensive to improve the terms and conditions of their members. Moreover, they also seek to represent the wider and more fundamental interests of workers in society. Trade unions campaign for changes in government policy, establishing or supporting political parties. They involve themselves in a wide range of economic, social, cultural and political issues, both domestic and international.

Through the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and together with socialist organisations, unions established the Labour Party at the beginning of the 20th century, not only to represent working class interests in parliament but to strive for a socialist society.

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, for socialism.

These organisations, together with the cooperative movement and a host of other bodies built by the working class, comprise the labour movement. Only this movement has the organisational capacity to overcome the forces of state-monopoly capitalism. This potential has been glimpsed when, for example, the

TUC and the trade unions have organised enormous, broad-based demonstrations against racism and fascism (1994), in defence of the National Health Service (2007) and against the austerity policies of the Tory-Liberal Democrat government (March 2011).

But what enables the working class, uniquely, to be the leading force in the struggle for socialism is the fact that capitalism would cease to function without its labour power.

Furthermore, the working class has also gained extensive experience, born of necessity, in developing unity between people. Whether in industry or services, in the private or public sector, large enterprises embrace the greatest diversity of workers. They reflect in miniature the diversity of the whole working class. Building and maintaining trade unions in large workplaces that can confront monopolist employers and the state inevitably gives these workers the longest and deepest experience of overcoming sectionalism. They learn why it is essential to combine the legitimate, immediate interests of any one section of the working class with the long-term interests of the class as a whole.

Trades union organisation and ideas of class solidarity have spread among workers in the state apparatus, in the mass media and other key areas of society. Nor should the importance of these ideas in smaller enterprises, including in the most technologically advanced sectors, be underestimated. Such developments represent an important extension of the power of the working class to engage in mass struggle, utilising an ever-wider range of tactics and techniques.

Over recent decades many more women, black and migrant workers have entered the workforce, often in temporary or part-time jobs. Employers have tried to use such workers to undermine general levels of pay, conditions and trade union collective bargaining. It is therefore in the interests of all workers, not only those being super-exploited, to fight for equal pay for work of equal value, for better conditions and for the full implementation of negotiated agreements.

The scandal of low pay must become a central issue for the unions. They also have a responsibility to step up the fight against all forms of prejudice and discrimination. The demands for genuine equality for women, black workers and other oppressed sections are essential aspects of the class struggle. As such, they must be recognised as a priority for the whole working class. Campaigning along these lines will help to build confidence in the role of the labour movement among women, black, young and migrant workers, enabling and encouraging them to participate in it fully on the basis of equality.

At the all-Britain level, the TUC and its equalities committees and conferences must play a leading role in taking bold, broad-based and campaigning initiatives. The Scottish TUC, Welsh TUC, English regional TUCs and local Trades Councils are also crucial to building campaigning alliances for progressive and left-wing policies, although they must have the resources to do so effectively.

There is no substitute in modern capitalist society for the organised working class as the leading force in the struggle for progressive and revolutionary change.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AND THE LEFT

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 temporary interests of the labour movement, rather than abolish it in the fundamental interests of the working class and humanity as a whole.

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.

The unique structure and composition of the Labour Party has ensured the continuation of a significant socialist trend within it. 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.

But the Labour Party left is not a cohesive and united force. The predominance of the social-democratic trend over the socialist trend in the Labour Party leadership, especially in Parliament, has helped ensure that Labour governments have only ever reformed capitalism, not abolished it.

The New Labour faction, which seized control of the party in the mid-1990s, represented the emergence of a new trend from within social democracy. Adapting to and then championing neoliberal policies and imperialist 'globalisation', it broke from social democracy to openly represent monopoly capital in the emerging new phase of imperialism. In its drive to turn the Labour Party into a wholehearted 'party for business', it brought the corrupting interests of monopoly capital into important aspects of party and government activity.

To ensure the Labour Party's acquiescence in its own political and ideological transformation, a series of measures were adopted by agreement with misguided trade union leaders to dismantle democratic processes within the party. The resulting centralisation challenged the Labour's 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.

Whether the trade unions and the socialist and social-democratic trends will be sufficiently strong, resolute and united to take back control of the Labour Party from New Labour can only be assessed in the course of a determined struggle to do so.

The working class and peoples of Britain need a mass political party, based on the labour movement, that can win general elections, form a government and implement substantial reforms in their interests.

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 reclaim 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 an objective that every non-sectarian socialist and communist should support, whether from within the Labour Party or from without.

But decisive progress in this direction requires the unions themselves to fight both inside and outside the Labour Party for policies that will challenge state-monopoly capitalism in Britain. Moreover, support will need to be won at every level of the trade unions and the whole labour movement for an alternative economic and political strategy (AEPS) to that being pursued by the British ruling class. This would provide the most favourable conditions in which to resolve the crisis of working class electoral representation. Here, too, the Communist Party and the daily socialist *Morning Star* newspaper have an important contribution to make to the struggle within the labour movement.

Only after a determined fight can the big trade unions make a realistic assessment of whether the Labour Party can be reclaimed. They will have to decide whether to persevere or, together with their political allies, to re-establish a mass party of labour that will represent the interests of the working class and the people generally.

For as long as little or no progress is made in the direction of reclaiming or re-establishing such a party, other left-wing and class-struggle trends are likely to emerge that are not organisationally or politically related to the Labour Party. It is likely that they will seek to participate in the political and electoral arena.

The Communist Party's role is to work with all 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 reclaimed or re-established mass party of labour, one federally organised to permit the affiliation of socialist and communist parties and committed to the fight for socialism.

Socialist and progressive forces, left parliamentary and assembly representatives in the Greens, Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National Party (SNP) and other organisations also have an important part to play in the battles for reforms, for peace and for more fundamental social change. But they do not resolve the crisis of

labour movement political representation. Neither do sectarian or ultra-left initiatives which have no significant base in the working class and which misrepresent themselves as the alternative or the solution to the fight for a mass party of labour.

PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENTS AND ALLIANCES

Workers do not exist in a vacuum and the economic sphere, in spite of its importance, is not the only aspect of people's lives. Monopoly capitalism has its impact on these other aspects and identities as well, and many workers may be brought to political ideas and activity by social, democratic or international issues not directly related to work or the economy. Other people too, including those in the non-monopoly section of the capitalist class, can become aware of the destructive and divisive character of monopoly capitalism, coming to see it either as the cause of problems in society or as the system which obstructs their solution.

Oppression affects people in diverse ways and the movements which have been built to resist it are equally diverse.

The women's movement in Britain has a long and proud tradition of fighting for economic, social and political rights. Yet, in spite of the fact that working class women make up the largest and most oppressed group of women, the aims and leadership of some of these initiatives have been heavily influenced by more affluent women. The National Assembly of Women is an exception, rooted as it is in the working class. Its campaigns for equal pay, workplace nurseries, price controls, peace etc. have won considerable support in the labour movement. Within their trade unions, women have also campaigned over a long period on issues related to their conditions in work and society.

The adoption of the Charter for Women by major sections of the trade union movement represents a growing understanding of the relationship between class exploitation and social oppression, and a determination to take up key issues within both the labour and women's movements.

There is also a growing understanding among those who campaign for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights of the ways in which powerful vested interests in capitalist society act to perpetuate prejudice and oppression.

The growth of self-organisation among the black and minority ethnic communities, exemplified by the Indian Workers Association, provides an important basis for challenging the prejudice and discrimination that emanate from empire, colonialism and imperialism. The broad-based anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigning by Searchlight and other organisations also plays an important role.

However, much more needs to be done to mobilise black, minority 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 fascist organisations halted in their tracks.

As well as movements against oppression, there are other social forces whose interests conflict with those of state-monopoly capitalism.

Young people face their own specific problems, whether as students or young workers, as well as those they face in common with other sections of the population. Insecure employment and mass unemployment have become fixtures for younger generations, aggravating the discrimination felt by young women and black youth. Discontent among young people too often meets with demonisation by the mass media and harassment from the authorities. There is also the danger that continuing youth unemployment will strengthen the appeal of the extreme right-wing. This will be made all the easier by the growing frustration of young people and their lack of contact with the labour and progressive movements.

Therefore the labour movement needs to reach out to young people, offering them support in meeting the challenges they face. Its organisations must welcome new members, help provide social and cultural facilities, enable them to organise together and support their campaigns for decent work, equality, housing and education.

The students' movement has shown its capacity to mobilise on issues of access to education, students' living standards and the range and quality of courses. Coordination with teachers' and lecturers' unions has been of mutual benefit. But the whole labour movement needs to recognise the significance of these and related issues for the quality of life of workers and their families.

The fight against mass unemployment and precarious employment must unite the employed and the unemployed around key demands for decent, secure, well-paid jobs, free training and educational opportunities and adequate unemployment benefits. To this end, the role of unemployed workers' centres as campaigning organisations should be strengthened, along with trade unions actively recruiting and representing the unemployed.

In recent decades, as millions of older people face a life of poverty and isolation, the pensioners' movement has taken on a new militancy. But the fight for a 'living pension' and support from decent public and social services is not the responsibility of pensioners alone. All trades unions have to understand that this is a fight for their members' future. The provision of a decent basic state pension is essential to guarantee a financially secure retirement.

Every union should have a retired members' section. Although the pensioners' movement has received increased backing from trades unions, the labour movement needs to help turn this into a truly mass, broad-based and militant campaign.

Public opposition to militarism and imperialist war has drawn hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people into the campaigning activities of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), the Stop the War Coalition and other peace organisations. While it is essential to maintain the broad appeal and unity of the

peace and anti-war movements, the connections between monopoly capital, British and United States (US) imperialism, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the European Union (EU) and the drive to militarisation and war need to be exposed and understood.

Sections of the environmental movement already recognise the extent to which monopoly capitalism threatens to destroy our planet's eco-system. The imperialist powers resist the measures necessary to protect it, because those measures would challenge monopoly profit and prerogatives. As a matter of urgency, this understanding must be won throughout the environmental and labour movements and in society as a whole.

The national movements in Scotland, Wales and Cornwall also contain substantial progressive and left-wing elements that oppose reactionary policies of monopoly capital and the British state. While they tend to over-emphasise the national rather than the class dimension of important issues, many members and supporters of the SNP, Plaid Cymru and Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (the Welsh Language Society) can be won to fight for measures which favour the working class and challenge the interests of British imperialism.

In Britain and its constituent nations, there is a long tradition of international solidarity. Today, there are active movements campaigning in solidarity with peoples facing imperialist-backed subversion, as in Cuba and Venezuela, or repression as in Palestine and Colombia.

In the case of all of these progressive movements, they cannot be considered as wholly separate from the working class. Working class people make up a substantial proportion, in most cases the vast majority, of their members. Moreover, through their activity in such movements, many people will come to a political, class understanding of society and the need for action to change it.

When assessing the forces that can be mobilised for progress, due account should be taken of divisions within the capitalist class. Some sectors or enterprises orientated towards industry rather than financial services, or the domestic rather than export market, or which are home-owned rather than owned from outside, can be split away from a united front of monopoly capital by appropriate measures. Small businesses may have their own reasons for opposing monopoly power, and their support for anti-monopoly policies can prove important in blocking reactionary mobilisations against the labour movement and the left.

The organised working class needs to show them that lining up with big business against the workers will never solve their problems. It must seek to win small businesses to the side of the labour movement, and prevent them falling prey to right-wing and fascist propaganda. This means campaigning for measures such as cheap credit, restrictions on monopoly price manipulation, controls on rent, relief from high business rates, the abolition of Value Added Tax (VAT) etc., as well as winning small businesses for the wider

democratic demands of the working class, including the struggle for peace, disarmament and environmental protection.

Self-employed workers who own their own means of production, alongside small business owners, including small farmers, who employ little or no labour, are part of the intermediate strata. They are in neither the capitalist class nor the working class. While they are not exploited as workers, neither do they profit primarily from the labour of others. The intermediate strata also include those senior managers who are still ultimately dependent on selling their own labour power for much of their livelihood. But they also direct the exploitation of labour in the private or public sectors, and may derive a proportion of their own income from the surplus value produced by others.

Some of the people in these intermediate strata can and should be won for anti-monopoly and progressive policies.

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, it represented a fundamental break with the class collaboration and pro-imperialist approach of social democracy that has always prevailed in the Labour Party. 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 ensure that the working class and its allies take political power and use it to overthrow capitalism.

The Communist Party is rooted in the working class, as the leading potential force for revolution, while also being open to all who share its aims and ideas. The Party also seeks to organise itself in every major area of economic, social, cultural and political struggle.

It draws upon the commitment, creativity and initiative of its members in order to make the most effective contribution possible to the labour and progressive movements. It is also a democratic and a disciplined force, striving to involve its members fully in the formation, renewal and implementation of the Party's policies.

As part of the international communist movement, it benefits from extensive links with scores of communist and workers' parties and national liberation movements around the world. Such links enhance the contribution that the communists in Britain make to the trade union, peace, solidarity and other movements.

The basis, outlook, organisation and internationalism of the Communist Party enable it to combine theory with practice. It engages in the battle of ideas whilst assisting the labour and progressive movements to fight consciously and strategically across every front, and not just from day to day. As the Marxist party with the longest and deepest roots

in the labour movement, communists therefore have a fundamentally different approach from the often shallow, opportunistic, short-term and ultimately self-defeating politics of the Labour Party and other reformist organisations.

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

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. Moreover, 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 policies or objectives.

But it is the Communist Party's strategic and political outlook, expressed above all in its programme, which enables communists to analyse the major struggles – including that for socialism itself – and to identify the potential allies at each stage. In this way, on the basis of cooperation and mutual respect, it seeks to give guidance and win leadership in the mass movement that must be built for socialist revolution.

In order to play its vital role in every stage of the revolutionary process, the Communist Party constantly seeks to strengthen its organisation and improve its membership in both quantity and quality. A loose association of communists, whether or not part of a wider political party or alliance, would not provide the type of organisation, the resources, the independence of thought, the freedom of action and the international relations that enable the Communist Party to provide influence and leadership.

This does not preclude, for example, 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. But history and experience show that a powerful, influential Communist Party is essential if a mass movement for revolutionary change is to succeed.

Socialists and progressives who broadly agree with the Communist Party's programme should consider joining the party and help put Britain on the road to socialism. ●

5 An alternative economic and political strategy

WHAT KIND OF STRATEGY would unite the maximum forces for progress, reforms and socialist revolution at each stage of the revolutionary process?

Its starting point must be to identify the objective basis for building a broad alliance across a wide range of movements that would open the road to socialism. This can only be opposition to the policies of state-monopoly capitalism in Britain.

Clearly, building such an alliance would have to take into account the differing conditions in Scotland and in Wales, not least because each has its own parliament or assembly with their own distinctive politics and policies. The European and wider international dimensions would also have to be considered.

Nonetheless, the reality is that most of the capitalist monopolies based in Britain are owned and controlled at the British – not the Scottish, Welsh, English, European or global – level. Despite the importance of international markets, the predominant economic relations in Britain are domestic rather than international. Most production is for home consumption and most consumption and investment is supplied from within the British economy rather than from outside. Likewise, monopoly capitalist political power is exercised primarily through the apparatus of the British state. That is why the labour movement and its allies must propose an alternative economic and political strategy (AEPS) to that of the capitalist monopolies and the British state.

The struggle to implement such a strategy will undoubtedly be weakened if it is divided separately between Scotland, Wales and England while the ruling capitalist class remains organised and united at the British level. That is why the type of AEPS favoured by the Communist Party emphasises the need to maintain and enhance unity between the labour and progressive movements, across the three nations of Britain.

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. It might also cause substantial economic dislocation as big business use threats and promises on jobs and investment to exert pressure on Scottish, Welsh and English governments to outbid each other in 'business-friendly' and 'pro-market' policies. Moreover, 'independence' would prove illusory in nations whose economy is still dominated by the capitalist monopolies and the anti-democratic, imperialist European Union (EU).

Of course, should the peoples of Scotland or Wales express a preference to secede from the United Kingdom, their wishes must be respected and negotiations take place to ensure that separation takes

place on an amicable basis. For communists, the question of separation for Scotland and Wales is one of revolutionary strategy for united working class struggle against the British ruling class, not of supporting or opposing the union of the three nations of Britain in principle.

In seeking to challenge and defeat British state-monopoly capitalism, the AEPS must engage with the class struggle on the economic, political and ideological fronts. It must also propose the kind of policies that can promote the interests of the working class and the mass of the peoples of Britain, making inroads into the wealth and power of the capitalist class. Such a left-wing programme (LWP) would therefore need to embrace important economic, environmental, social, cultural, financial, democratic and foreign policy questions.

The AEPS would also have to identify the forces which, if brought together, would constitute the most powerful alliance to fight for the LWP against state-monopoly capitalism. This in turn raises the question of how such a popular, democratic anti-monopoly alliance would seek political power, including the role of elections and governments.

Finally, the AEPS must be able to outline the most likely stages through which the revolutionary process will have to go in the struggle for political power and socialism.

THE FIGHT ON THREE FRONTS

The ruling capitalist class wages its political class struggle on three main, distinct but inter-connected fronts: the economic, the political and the ideological and cultural. This requires corresponding responses from the labour and progressive movements.

On the economic front, the main strategic objectives must be to maintain and improve the living standards of working people and their families at every stage of life, based on full employment in a modern, productive, balanced and sustainable domestic economy. Strong, democratic and independent trade unions are central to fighting for these goals, in alliance with other progressive movements representing particular interests or sections of the population.

But if the working class is to put an end to exploitation and oppression altogether, the trade union struggle against employers must go beyond this specific economic objective to embrace the political relation between workers and the state. Industrial militancy is not enough. It is necessary to combat the outlook that sees the fight on economic issues as sufficient in itself. In fact, this fight needs to be linked with a political perspective if it is to produce lasting gains for the working class.

Politically, the labour and progressive movements must have their own political organisations to fight for policies and reforms, including in the electoral arena. Here the main strategic objectives are to protect and extend democratic freedoms and to take the political struggle into every sphere of the state apparatus – not least parliament, the government and the civil service – to try to impose the interests of the working class and the people generally. The movements need to develop their own organisations in collective action to win their objectives at each stage. In so doing, they will gain vital experience for exercising state power themselves when the time comes.

On the ideological front, the left and the labour and progressive movements 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. People must be won to support and participate in the struggle to ensure that all their legitimate needs are met. Notions of ‘free enterprise’, ‘the free market’ and ‘social partnership’; ideas of national or racial superiority or exclusiveness; sexism, ageism, homophobia, anti-communism, obscurantism, sectionalism and nihilism all serve to divide, disorientate or undermine the working class and the struggle for socialism. To these should be counterposed the values and ideas of cooperation, planning, collective and class interests, the common good, liberation and social justice, multiculturalism, internationalism, rational thought and human liberation. These strengthen the struggle for socialism.

The value of art and culture as a liberating force that can stimulate as well as stifle human development has to be fully appreciated. It is an important medium through which the values, notions, prejudices and thought processes that serve the interests of capitalism must be challenged.

Through the education system, too, the ruling class seeks to propagate its ideas, values and views that have to be challenged by the anti-imperialist left. The content of the national curriculum and associated teaching environments, materials and methods must be a particularly important focus for this vital aspect of the ideological struggle.

On the economic, political and ideological 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 LEFT-WING PROGRAMME

As well as stepping up the resistance to the policies of the capitalist monopolies and their state, and securing solidarity and coordination wherever possible, the labour and progressive movements need a unifying

programme of alternative policies.

Such a coherent, integrated LWP would therefore comprise a vital component of the AEPS. It will give direction to all those fighting against right-wing policies and the capitalist monopolies, adding to their confidence and combativeness as realisable advances are won. Many of these policies can also be popularised through initiatives such as the People's Charter for Change, the Charter for Women and the Charter for Youth.

But in important respects, the LWP goes further. While showing how policies in different spheres can reinforce one another, it lays the basis for even more advanced policies from a left-wing government at a later stage in the revolutionary process. That is why it must be debated, adopted and fought for at every level of the labour and progressive movements, making possible the kind of mass movement and mass struggle essential for victory.

Building a productive, sustainable economy

The LWP will have to include policies to end the City of London's financial domination of British government economic policy. They should strengthen productive industry and our public services, achieve full employment, assist Third World development and contribute to safeguarding our planet's eco-system.

Full employment must be restored as a central objective of government economic policy. All young people should be guaranteed a job, good-quality training or apprenticeship, or a place in post-school education. The LWP would therefore need policies to invest massively in public services and end all forms of privatisation. Public and private sector investment should be directed into manufacturing and productive industry, with controls imposed on the export of capital. Exporting more hi-tech goods and services to developing countries would help meet their economic and social needs while sustaining productive employment in Britain. Through a comprehensive system of planning agreements, and with the fullest participation of workers and their unions, the government committed to the LWP would be able to ensure that major private companies pursue investment, employment, pensions and other policies that serve the interests of workers, the economy and society.

A shorter working week and standard working life, with no loss of pay, would also help to ensure that investment in new technology does not lead to an overall loss of jobs. Mass redundancies should be outlawed in viable enterprises, while strategic enterprises threatened by closure are taken into democratic public ownership. Advertising, financial and property services should be limited and their socially useful functions transferred to public bodies. Hostile buy-outs based on debt and asset-stripping must be stopped, along with speculation in commodities, securities and derivatives.

Support for viable, sustainable local communities in the countryside will also require specific measures to provide well-paid employment in farming, forestry,

conservation and tertiary industries including light engineering, manufacturing and construction. Sustainable agricultural production should be expanded but subsidies ended to big landowners and agri-business. Britain should aim to become more self-sufficient in food production, with support for small and tenant farmers, including incentives for cooperative initiatives. Landed estates, luxury tourist establishments and 'second' homes must be brought under the democratic control of local communities. No longer will big landowners, property developers and big business be permitted to impose unwanted development against the wishes of local people.

Securing the economic base of rural communities will help ensure the future of vital local school, public transport, postal and communication services, supported where necessary by central government funding. Such policies are especially necessary if young people are to have a viable and fulfilling future while sustaining our rural communities.

Measures to promote cooperative, municipal and other forms of social enterprise and common ownership can provide an alternative to capitalist enterprise and a glimpse of post-capitalist possibilities, although at this stage they have to function within the confines of the monopoly-dominated 'free' market in the capitalist system.

Democratic public ownership of the financial sector, gas, electricity, water, oil, railways, buses, road haulage and air travel is the only basis on which these vital sectors and resources can be planned, integrated and managed in the interests of society and the environment. Such an approach would facilitate the extension of rail and tram networks and a massive transfer of freight from road and air to rail.

A huge expansion of investment and production in wind, tidal, geo-thermal and solar power is vital to meet what will have to be strict targets for cutting carbon emissions. Policies might include, for example, installing solar panels in all large and new public and private sector buildings, and harnessing river estuary tidal power through the deployment of lagoon and submarine turbine technology.

Britain's substantial deep-mined coal reserves should be utilised with the application of clean-coal and carbon capture technology. This would provide the alternative to the massive open-cast developments which scar the landscape and blight nearby communities through traffic and other pollution.

Reliance on nuclear fission as a source of energy remains a costly, dangerous and hugely irresponsible option. The consequences of radioactive contamination can be calamitous. Decommissioning obsolete plant is enormously expensive. Eliminating or storing waste safely and permanently cannot yet be done. The by-product of nuclear power generation – plutonium – provides the otherwise scarce core material for most nuclear weapons.

Nuclear fusion, on the other hand, neither requires uranium (another core material when further enriched) nor produces plutonium. This safer technology could

supply the planet's population with most, if not all, of its power. But major technical problems mean that research and development have been expensive and unprofitable. That is why private monopoly capital refused to invest in it. Britain's nuclear fusion programme, part of an international effort based here, should be kept in the public sector and hugely expanded as part of the drive against carbon emissions and global warming. Likewise, research should be intensified into alternative fission technology based on the use of thorium. It could prove to be safer and more efficient than uranium, does not produce weapon material and can burn up toxic waste and plutonium from scrapped nuclear plants and bombs.

National programmes of energy conservation, waste disposal and recycling would utilise the most advanced energy-efficient and environmentally friendly technology. They should include policies to support home-working, to bring jobs closer to where people live and to encourage greater use of public rather than private transport.

For social justice and democratic culture

The main social policies of the LWP must aim to raise people's living standards, sharply reduce social inequality, attack all forms of discrimination and encourage people's own cultural creativity.

The LWP will therefore need to include policies to increase state pensions, benefits and the national minimum wage substantially, linking them to rising earnings or prices and ending all discrimination against women and young workers. Compulsory equal pay audits across the private and public sectors would provide a clear framework for trade union and legal action to achieve equal pay for work of equal value in all workplaces. It is also important to provide 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 age of voluntary retirement should be reduced for all, with no loss of pension entitlements, thereby making jobs available for the next generation of workers.

Stronger legislation will need to be rigorously enforced against all forms of discrimination on grounds of gender, race, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, etc. The right of women to control their own bodies necessarily involves the right to free contraception and abortion across Britain. A comprehensive network of services and refuges for victims of domestic violence must be established throughout Britain, properly funded and regulated.

A massive drive has to be launched to build more council houses, especially in inner-city and rural communities, and to appropriate long-term empty properties for socially useful purposes. Free or affordable sheltered accommodation and residential care must be available for the elderly, together with free domestic fuel and public transport.

All measures to weaken, break up, commercialise or privatise the National Health Service (NHS) must be

halted and reversed. Medical treatment must remain free at the point of delivery, funded largely through progressive taxation. NHS coverage should be extended rather than reduced, for example into the provision of cancer screening and dental treatment. The aim must be to drive profiteering out of the NHS, while involving workers and users more closely in consultative and administrative functions.

Drug addiction will only be combated effectively through school and public health education, combined with substantial investment in treatment, not least in prison, and rehabilitation. The decriminalisation of drug addiction would signal the end of a failed and counter-productive policy. Similarly, combating self-destructive and anti-social behaviour will require much greater investment in the youth services and facilities that provide stimulating and constructive alternatives.

The education system needs to be of the highest quality, adequately staffed and free to all. Improving nursery and childcare provision and making it available to all, funded by the public and private sectors, will not only benefit the children themselves. It will also ensure that women with children can escape casual work on the margins and obtain jobs in the mainstream of the economy.

The principle of a comprehensive, secular primary and secondary education system must be resolutely upheld and, wherever possible, extended. Breaking up and privatising the current state system, separating children along religious lines and removing schools from democratic control will plunge Britain's education system into a new age of gross inequality, privilege and divisive sectarianism. Further and higher education, including the universities, must be accessible to every section of society, with grants generous enough to support students without recourse to loans or family contributions. Maintenance grants should be the right of all adults engaged in full-time study, with no place for tuition fees or graduate taxes.

The promotion of social harmony and good community relations can only be based on the principles of multiculturalism and secularism, respecting and celebrating cultural diversity while opposing oppressive ideas and practices in all cultures and religions. Freedom of religious belief and worship must be guaranteed for all, with no privileges for any one religion or church in the machinery of state.

The state must vigorously enforce laws against racial hatred and discrimination. But this should not be relied upon as a substitute for mass mobilisations to deny all platforms to racists and fascists, drowning them in a sea of popular, democratic activity.

Cultural policies should aim to encourage people's participation, creativity and self-organisation. This is the alternative to passive consumption of the mass, trite, individualistic 'culture' propagated by the capitalist monopolies and the state-licensed broadcasting media. It would require greater support for all kinds of local facilities and initiatives in the arts and physical culture, including in radio, television and film production, publishing and sport.

There will also need to be policies to promote the Welsh, Scots Gaelic and Cornish languages in economic, social, political and cultural life. All immigrants to Britain must have opportunities to learn the language of their new home area free of charge, whether English, Welsh or Scots Gaelic. The rights of all citizens will be protected as everyone is encouraged to make her or his distinctive contribution to Britain as a multicultural society.

Funding the left wing programme

Such an ambitious range of economic, social and cultural policies will have to be financed through a more progressive tax regime and revised public spending priorities. The LWP might therefore include policies to:

- Increase tax rates on higher rates of income.
- Levy an annual wealth tax on the richest section of the population.
- Impose a 'Robin Hood' tax on City financial transactions.
- Increase the rate of corporation tax on the profits of large companies.
- Place a windfall tax on monopoly profits in specific industries as necessary.
- Close all tax havens under British jurisdiction.
- Implement deep cuts in VAT on essential goods and services.
- Replace the council tax by local income, wealth, land and property taxes based clearly on the ability to pay.
- Renegotiate and, where appropriate, cancel Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts in order to eliminate excessive corporate profiteering.
- Cut British military spending and end all state subsidies for armaments exports.
- Control movements of capital in and out of Britain.

Over time, as inequalities in income and wealth are eroded, economic growth would provide more of the basis for increased tax revenues.

EXTENDING AND DEEPENING DEMOCRACY

The struggle to promote the economic and social interests of working people is directly linked with the battle to expand democracy against the power of big business. The institutions of state and their top officials must be made answerable to elected representatives, who in turn must be fully accountable to the people. More extensive democratic rights are necessary, not least so that people and their organisations can take action more freely and effectively.

The LWP should therefore include measures to restore the democratic and civil liberties abolished or eroded by Conservative and Labour governments since 1979, especially those relating to assembly, demonstration and detention without charge.

This would also mean repealing the anti-trade union laws so that trade unionists are free to govern their own

organisations and determine their own policies. The right to take industrial and solidarity action without the threat of sequestration and imprisonment is a fundamental human right, enshrined in international law. Full trade union rights must be extended to police and prison officers, intelligence staff and armed forces personnel, who should also be encouraged to study and discuss the wider social, civic and political context in which they operate.

All workers should qualify for full and equal rights at work from day one of a job. Workers and their trade union representatives should have more extensive rights to consultation and veto over company plans relating to substantial restructuring, mass redundancy or closure.

Britain's asylum, immigration and nationality laws must be purged of all direct and indirect racial discrimination, and the internment centres for asylum seekers must be closed.

So that Britain's parliaments and assemblies more closely represent the preferences of the electors, they should be elected by single transferable vote in multi-member constituencies. This would ensure proportional representation without breaking the direct link between elected representatives and meaningful local constituencies. Such representatives would be made constantly accountable if electors had the right to petition for a by-election.

Political parties should not receive any state funding, so that they have to rely largely on voluntary donations from the people they claim to represent. Corporate political donations should be submitted to a ballot of the employers and employees of the enterprise concerned.

Setting the age of adulthood, including the right to vote, at 16 would reflect the other freedoms and responsibilities acquired by many young people at that age.

The role of the mass media in promoting and sustaining democracy would be transformed by breaking up monopoly ownership and control. Greater diversity of sources and views, a statutory right of reply and an end to the use of injunctions and libel laws by the wealthy and powerful would hugely expand media freedom in Britain.

To revive and develop community participation, accountability and self-government, powers and resources should be restored to local government in areas such as business taxation, council housing, management of schools and public transport.

Likewise at British state level, the Westminster parliament must take steps to recover important powers from the EU and its institutions. The House of Lords should be abolished and the Church of England disestablished as the official state church.

It is essential that the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly have the full economic, legislative and financial powers necessary to protect and develop the economic, social and cultural interests of their peoples. Such powers and resources are particularly important for the Scottish and Welsh governments to enable them to intervene decisively in the economy, to exercise

popular sovereignty over monopoly and market forces.

The growth of legislative powers in Scotland and Wales raises the question of the legislative process for England. The Communist Party believes that this will best be resolved by the House of Commons reconstituting itself as an English parliament, with only the English MPs present whenever England-only measures are considered.

A longer-term constitutional settlement, based on the unity of three nations of Britain combined with substantial powers of self-government for each, might take the form of a federal system with new structures that reflect their equal status.

Directly-elected regional government in England should proceed where there is clear demand, although without sufficient powers and resources to direct economic development there is the danger of creating 'talking shops' which draw powers from local councils instead. English regional assemblies should also take control of services currently administered by non-elected public bodies – 'quangos' – in fields such as training, further education and health.

The distinctive cultural and social characteristics of Cornwall should be expressed through a directly elected Cornish Assembly, with powers that match local aspirations.

The special status enjoyed by monopoly capital in the Isle of Man and Channel Isles, which are run as semi-feudal big business fiefdoms, will have to be ended. Instead, the peoples of those islands should be democratically represented in the Westminster parliament, with their own democratic parliaments – Tynwald and the States – strengthened by proportional representation and economic powers like those proposed for Wales and Scotland.

An independent foreign policy for Britain

In the international arena, the aim of the LWP must be to ensure that Britain pursues its own foreign policy, independent of the United States (US) and the EU.

A left government in Britain would strengthen relations with progressive regimes and movements around the world on the basis of practical and political solidarity.

It would seek to develop fair economic relations, except where people demand the boycott of an oppressive or occupying regime in their own country.

Major new trade and technology agreements with developing countries would bring mutual benefit. 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. It follows that the left government would therefore oppose neoliberal economic and financial policies in all international agencies of which Britain is a member.

The development of the United Nations (UN) and

its associated institutions as agencies for progress will depend on the strengthening of working class and anti-imperialist forces at national level. Making the permanent membership of the UN Security Council more representative of the world's peoples, with states such as China retaining their veto, would provide some counter-balance to the abuse and manipulation of the UN and member states by the imperialist powers.

An independent, progressive foreign policy for Britain would also include support for measures to rid the world of nuclear testing and all weapons of mass destruction. Unilaterally abolishing nuclear weapons, as Ukraine and South Africa have done, would enable Britain to promote multilateral nuclear and conventional disarmament more effectively. The resources currently wasted on unnecessary armaments research, development and production should be redirected to socially useful purposes, notably in such fields as renewable energy technology and advanced communications, transport and rescue systems.

Clearly, the subservient alliance with US imperialism, including collusion in the violation of fundamental human rights and international law, would have to cease immediately. All British involvement in military invasions and occupations of other people's countries must also end, as should diplomatic support and arms exports to repressive regimes. Any further enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) should be opposed and, failing that organisation's dissolution, Britain should withdraw from it.

In the absence of any significant progress towards the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian state on the basis of UN resolutions, alongside a secure Israel, the British government should pursue unilateral and multilateral sanctions against the Israeli state and its institutions until real progress is made.

Striving to implement the domestic and international policies of the LWP would mean rejecting the neoliberal directives and policies of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the Council of Ministers, and legislating to negate the anti-trade union and anti-working class judgements of the European Court of Justice.

The British government should resist all further steps towards a 'United States of Europe' and begin preparations for Britain's withdrawal from the EU. New bilateral and multilateral agreements may need to be negotiated, for mutually beneficial cooperation with European and other countries. Britain should also oppose all attempts in the EU or Council of Europe to equate or supplant the crimes of fascism with the 'crimes of Communism'.

In Ireland, as well as fulfilling all the terms of the Good Friday Agreement in the north, the British government should work with the Irish, Scottish and Welsh governments to strengthen and extend the work of the Council of the Isles. In particular, it would make clear Britain's commitment to help bring about the reunification of Ireland on the basis of popular consent, north and south.

A POPULAR DEMOCRATIC ANTI-MONOPOLY ALLIANCE

The motive force for advance in our society is the class struggle between workers and capitalists. But capitalism not only exploits people at work, it also oppresses them in many different aspects of their lives.

Thus people experience capitalism's negative effects not only in their workplaces, but in their communities and in their social, cultural and leisure activities. Students, pensioners, tenants, environmentalists and other movements, pressure groups, local community-based bodies, charities and the like challenge significant aspects of the current system, even though they may not always see their stance in ideological or political terms. They embrace people not only from different sections within the working class, but often from other classes and strata in society.

However, if these movements and struggles proceed in isolation from one another, they can only challenge the ruling class on single, isolated issues but not its overall domination and control.

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 needs to 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, democracy, 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 policies of the LWP challenge state-monopoly capitalism on every front. They also advance the interests of broader movements in which the working class is active and other sections of the population who can be won to support at least some substantial aspects of the programme. Thus people will be persuaded through experience that the organised working class alone has the capacity to strengthen and lead a popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance.

This alliance will be popular because it will win the support and embrace the interests of the people as a

whole, seeking to achieve their sovereignty over the monopoly capitalist minority. It will be democratic because it is posed against the anti-democratic essence of state-monopoly capitalism and seeks to mobilise the collective power of the working class and its allies against it.

The labour movement has to win its leading role by fighting for the whole range of policies in the LWP and respecting the independence and particular interests of other progressive movements.

The potential for progress in this direction has already been shown in the support won for the People's Charter for Change, the policies of which broadly reflect those of the LWP. Adopted by the Trades Union Congress in 2009, the movement for the Charter has since secured the individual affiliation of many national trade unions and trades councils.

WINNING A GOVERNMENT OF THE LEFT

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 in 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.

Moreover, it will be very important to win the election of left and progressive governments in Scotland and Wales in the same period, also backed by a popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance of forces but with the likely involvement of left and progressive elements in the Welsh and Scottish national movements.

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.

Different levels of left cooperation, coordination and unity are possible in election periods, although the Communist Party's preference is to build strategic alliances based on mass campaigning in between elections rather than rely upon short-term, expedient tactical agreements.

Mass, active, popular and working class support will be essential to implement key policies of the LWP. The peoples of Britain are unlikely to give such support without also having the opportunity to express it in the electoral arena. Indeed, such democratic endorsement will be vital in order to mobilise the working class and its allies to overcome all forms of resistance and sabotage, as a left-wing government implements policies that challenge the interests of big business and the state apparatus.

It is likely that such developments will also produce new forms of working class and progressive organisation. The history of resistance and revolutionary movements in every country is that they give rise to new forms of self-organisation. In Britain, for example, working class and popular struggle has led to the formation of Working Men's Associations, the National and Female Charter Associations, workers' and consumers' cooperatives, workers' and soldiers' councils, councils of action, the People's Convention, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions, miners' support groups and Women Against Pit Closures, anti-poll tax unions, the Stop the War Coalition and the People's Charter for Change movement.

The forces drawn to the popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance will take new forms and create new structures. It will be important that these play a full role in the AEPS as it unfolds.

Communists also understand that the election of a left government guarantees nothing. Democracy is very limited, distorted and precarious in a capitalist society. It does not extend into people's working lives, which comprise up to one-half of their waking hours. It can be countermanded by the enormous wealth and power of the capitalist class and its mass media. Furthermore, democracy can itself be eroded by the actions of the government and the state. Even the much-proclaimed 'sovereignty of parliament' is contradicted in reality by the power of the executive, the state apparatus, the mass media, the monopoly capitalists and their 'market forces', the EU and international agencies such as NATO, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Union Organisation.

Experience also indicates that the British ruling class and its allies are prepared to be utterly ruthless in defending their interests, not only through the use of state power at home but also abroad through the use of economic sabotage, military force, anti-democratic subversion, military dictatorship, state torture and death squads.

This underlines the need for a popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance to secure the maximum support for policies that challenge any aspect of state-monopoly capitalism. A left government in Britain will need to be rooted in mass extra-parliamentary campaigning and militancy if it is to survive and succeed. ●

6 Towards socialism and communism

THE ELECTION OF 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, above all, 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.

Every effort will have to be made to involve the labour and progressive movements, and new organisations formed in the course of mass action, in the formulation of policy, tactics and strategy and in the enforcement of government measures based on the LWP.

Because European Union (EU) fundamental treaties and institutions cannot be radically reformed without near-unanimous agreement among all member states, Britain will almost certainly have to withdraw from the EU in order to implement policies.

Such an assertion of popular sovereignty will also be necessary if British governments are to develop free and equal trade, commercial and political relations with other countries across the globe, acting in solidarity with oppressed peoples and promoting such values in the United Nations (UN) and other international bodies.

The drive to implement the LWP will undoubtedly meet with resistance from powerful sections of the capitalist class and from within the state itself. The British ruling class will seek support from anti-socialist allies within Britain and abroad, in the world's financial and currency markets, the boardrooms of transnational corporations, the institutions of the EU, the United States (US) government, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The example of Chile demonstrates the willingness of the US and British ruling classes to destroy long-established parliamentary democracy in defence of imperialist interests. In 1973, the elected Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende was overthrown by a military coup orchestrated by the US administration, carried out by Chilean generals and backed by US transnational corporations (TNCs) and Chilean landowners. Policies of progressive nationalisation were reversed by 'made in the USA' neoliberalism. British governments subsequently lent military, financial and trading assistance to that murderous dictatorship.

The defeat in Chile confirmed the importance of limiting the opportunities for outside interference,

understanding the difference between government office and state power, replacing reactionary personnel in top state positions, consolidating broad alliances (and curbing ultra-leftist adventurism), building a Communist Party able to exercise decisive influence and developing a military policy that relies upon the mass of the people.

In Britain, the popular movement – with the organised working class at its core – and the left government would need to be organised and ready to overcome all covert and overt counter-revolutionary activities.

THE INTERNATIONAL BALANCE OF FORCES

The damage that could be inflicted on a left government and its programme from outside should not be underestimated. Attacks on Britain's currency and the government's ability to borrow in financial markets, a huge political propaganda offensive, denunciations or diktats from the EU Commission, the European Central Bank and the European Court of Justice, restrictions on imports from Britain, are all possible as international capitalism seeks to block Britain's road to socialism.

Yet these dangers should not be overestimated, either.

The policies in the LWP are intended to reduce vulnerability to outside pressure and sabotage. This can be done, for instance, by taking strategic sectors and enterprises in the British economy into public ownership. Taxing the wealthy and monopoly profits would reduce the need for government borrowing. Britain should keep out of the euro-zone as public opinion is prepared for possible confrontation with EU neoliberal policies. Britain's industrial base must be rebuilt and economic and political relations strengthened with non-imperialist and developing countries.

Recent shifts in the world balance of forces have strengthened the potential for a left government in Britain to develop mutually beneficial international relations beyond US and EU control, not least in Asia and Latin America.

Movements of the left have gained ground in Latin America, inspired by Cuba and driven in part by the Bolivarian socialist revolution unfolding in Venezuela. Those governments have collaborated in continental initiatives to eliminate economic, financial and political dependence on the US. Latin American-wide initiatives in trade and development, currency, broadcasting and diplomacy provide a progressive, alternative model of regional cooperation between sovereign states to that of the EU.

The re-emergence of capitalism's general crisis has generated mass opposition to its most important aspects in many countries. Anti-globalisation, anti-war and environmentalist movements have sprung up to challenge capitalism's severe deficiencies as an economic and social system. Workers and their trade unions are fighting back against deregulation, privatisation, cuts in public and welfare services, mass redundancies and the use of non-union labour to undermine trade union rights and terms and conditions of employment.

As ever, communists and socialists come to the fore in such battles, providing strategic leadership. So there is every prospect that a left government in Britain and its supporters will have allies in the international arena.

Communist, left-wing, progressive, anti-imperialist and non-aligned governments abroad may be in a position to extend diplomatic, political and economic assistance. The trade union, left-wing, peace and environmental movements in other countries would be called upon to exert pressure or take action in solidarity with their allies in Britain.

Certainly, there is every prospect that the international links of Britain's working-class, progressive and communist movements will continue to develop. Broadening and deepening such relations would already have been a very high priority for all sections of the popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance.

Above all, it is unlikely that substantial political advances in Britain would have been made in isolation. Working class and revolutionary movements in other advanced capitalist countries and in Latin America, Africa and Asia may also be putting their own ruling class under increasing pressure.

In any event, communists do not accept that there is a law of history that makes it impossible to achieve socialist revolution in one country before others, or that one of the wealthiest, most developed societies in the world is incapable of proceeding to construct its own model of socialism. The uneven economic and political development of capitalism makes it possible to break weak links in the imperialist chain. The fundamental contradictions of capitalism ensure that the necessity for socialist revolution suggests itself everywhere, sooner or later.

TAKING STATE POWER AND DEFEATING COUNTER-REVOLUTION

Previous experience of social-democratic governments in Britain, notably in the 1960s and 1970s, indicates that a real left government must expect attempts at economic and financial sabotage. An investment strike, the flight of capital, an attack on Britain's currency, trade sanctions and a boycott of government bills and bonds should all be anticipated.

This is why the left government must take steps to control the movement of capital, close all tax havens under British jurisdiction and use the requisite powers to control and liquidate British-owned economic and financial assets abroad. There may also be tactical value in prioritising the public ownership of sectors or enterprises according to the economic or political threat

that they pose to the left government and socialist revolution at any given point.

In order to counteract anti-revolutionary propaganda, the grip of a small number of monopoly conglomerates on the capitalist mass media would have to be decisively broken. A more diverse pattern of ownership and control in the print, broadcasting, film, telecommunications and web-based media would reflect the wide range of legitimate interests and aspirations in a modern, democratic and tolerant society.

Efforts to publicise and implement even the mildest LWP policies will meet with resistance inside the civil service and associated public bodies, including regulatory agencies, the Bank of England and the state broadcasting system.

A left government does not mean that the apparatus and forces of the state are now on the side of a fundamental transformation of society. They are not, nor have they ever have been, neutral on the question of which socio-economic system should exist.

Key parts of the state apparatus will endeavour 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.

Therefore, the state itself will quickly become a focal point for heightened class struggle. 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. The introduction of wide-ranging trade union rights and civic education programmes will also help to break down oppressive and reactionary ideas and practices. 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.

The state's corps of military reservists would have to be expanded and linked with large workplaces and local working class communities. The trade union movement could be involved in its recruitment, education and administration. Over time, reflecting the adoption of an independent foreign policy based on peaceful coexistence, the balance of resources will tilt away from a full-time selective professional army towards popular military reservists with specialised professional units.

Throughout this process, the positive involvement of public sector trade unions will be essential. It will also be vital to secure the widest possible public support. This is more likely to be forthcoming if the left government's policies regularly receive democratic endorsement by the people in elections and referendums, and all parliamentary means are tried in order to implement the government's programme.

New bodies of working class and popular power are likely to be necessary to monitor or take over state functions and ensure implementation of the LWP.

The drive to implement key LWP policies relating to the state, capital controls, mass media ownership and membership of the EU and NATO will almost certainly meet the most determined resistance from monopoly capital and its forces within and outside the state apparatus.

Enormous confrontations will signify that the revolutionary process has entered its third, most crucial stage, following those in which the left government has taken office and then, with the mass movement, fought to enact the LWP. These new confrontations will decide whether the monopoly finance capitalists retain state power or have it taken from them by the working class and its allies.

It is also at this point that different and even contradictory interests within the popular democratic anti-monopoly alliance might come most sharply to the fore, encouraged and exploited from within the ruling class. In such circumstances, the left government and the labour movement will have to make enormous efforts to maintain the unity of the alliance through the best prioritisation of policies and choice of tactics, short of undermining or abandoning the revolutionary process itself. In particular, new forms and ways of cooperating together will have to develop to ensure that unity is maintained and cemented between the forces in the alliance and the new left government.

If progress in implementing key policies of the LWP has been obstructed to a significant extent, 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.

If, on the other hand, substantial inroads have already been made into the wealth and power of the finance capitalists, the conditions will be all the more favourable for taking the advanced measures necessary to remove political power from their hands, decisively and completely.

The ruling class will battle for its very survival and can be expected to use every weapon at its disposal against the revolutionary movement and the left government.

For example, as in the 1970s, private armies might form under the direction of ex-military chiefs, supported by big business leaders and sections of the mass media. This possibility will be reduced by the measures already proposed to democratise and unionise the armed forces and to break monopoly power, not least in the mass media.

Direct foreign military intervention against a left government in Britain with mass support is unlikely. Nevertheless, there is the possibility that US and NATO military bases in Britain might become centres of intrigue and subversion. Once again, this underlines the need for an elected left government to move swiftly to close all foreign military bases in Britain and withdraw from NATO and EU armed forces.

The key factor in this decisive, third stage of the revolutionary process will be the balance of forces outside parliament and in society as a whole. In particular, it will be vital to mobilise the popular anti-monopoly alliance – led by the organised working class – to uphold popular sovereignty and help the elected government to enforce its policies.

The extent to which this process involves physical or military violence will depend upon the revolutionary movement having the best strategy to minimise the capacity for resistance of the capitalist class. As the working class invariably bears the brunt of counter-revolutionary violence, it is the duty of all serious revolutionaries to devise such a strategy, rather than propose simplistic notions of violent insurrection and armed struggle.

In any event, there can be no question: the democratically elected left government will use all the official and popular forces at its disposal to crush each and every attempt at military subversion, rebellion or invasion.

Popular sovereignty means the sovereignty of the people and their elected representatives in parliaments, governments and mass movements. This requires the abolition of all powers and institutions relating to the monarchy, including such posts as head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, together with the royal prerogative, the Privy Council and similarly unaccountable offices of state. Such measures, for which mass support would have to be won, will themselves reduce the scope for counter-revolutionary violence against the people and their elected authorities.

Sweeping measures of reform, restructuring and democratisation will aim to replace the capitalist state apparatus with one that represents the interests of the working class and the whole population. This would establish what Marx and Lenin called 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', by which they meant simply the rule of the working class – in Britain the vast majority of the population. This would displace the present unelected rule – or dictatorship – of a tiny capitalist class.

BUILDING A SOCIALIST SOCIETY

Holding state power will enable the working class and its allies to complete the process of removing all economic and political power from the monopoly capitalist class. As capitalism is dismantled, so the construction of a new type of society – socialism – can proceed.

In Britain and its constituent nations, this will have to take place along the lines determined by the working class and the mass of the population. No alternative model can be imported from other countries, from different conditions and different times.

But this does not mean we cannot learn from successes and mistakes elsewhere.

For instance, the former Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China have demonstrated how centralised economic planning can play a vital role in promoting scientific education and rapid economic growth. Cooperative ownership helped secure a thriving agricultural sector in Hungary. Self-management in Yugoslavia showed how workers can be drawn into democratic decision-making at workplace level. The German Democratic Republic provided collective, social and workplace facilities on an extensive scale. In the Soviet Union, people's courts in large workplaces brought the criminal justice system closer to the people. In Cuba, Committees for the Defence of the Revolution involve local communities in a wide range of social, environmental and political campaigns. The former socialist countries demonstrated how different ethnic and national populations could live in harmony on the basis of cultural development, equal status and mutual respect.

All the former socialist countries placed a high priority on achieving full employment, universal healthcare and education, equal status in law for women and men, affordable housing and public transport for all, and on reducing inequalities between people living in urban and rural areas.

However, the conditions in which many countries embarked upon their roads to socialism also gave rise to features that would be unacceptable to people in Britain.

Here, socialism will have to be built with the maximum participation of people in government at every level. There must be full accountability of state power to the people, with free and wide-ranging debate facilitated by accessible and diverse mass media. Workers must have real powers in workplace decision-making. Indeed, in order to defeat attempts at counter-revolution and to involve the mass of the people in socialist development, democratic rights and freedoms would need to become deeply entrenched in every aspect of economic and political life, now free from the restrictions and distortions imposed by monopoly capital.

Moreover, it will be essential that new forms of popular participation and direct democracy arise in the workplace, localities, regions and nations of Britain to counteract any tendencies to over-centralisation, elitism, careerism and bureaucratic control.

All sections of the state apparatus at every level of society should be directed by the elected representatives of the people and monitored by non-state bodies appointed by working class and popular organisations. Freed from the requirements of maintaining capitalist rule and commercial confidentiality, most activities of the state must be open to public scrutiny and all should be open to scrutiny by the public's elected representatives.

The constitutional relationship between England, Scotland and Wales should develop according to the sovereign will of their peoples, whether that relationship

takes the form of co-existence in a federal state, a confederation or wholly separate from one another. The first of these arrangements might best maintain working class and progressive unity and solidarity. But, in any event, it is likely that socialist societies in those three nations will develop specific features of their own, reflecting their different economic, cultural and political conditions.

Socialism in Britain will also be characterised by diversity, tolerance and a healthy resistance to state interference in people's personal lives and choices.

Freedom of opinion and criticism must not only be guaranteed in law. It has to be given means of expression previously denied by monopoly ownership and control of the mass media. Religious freedoms must also be protected, although organised religions and their adherents should have no privileged position from which to undermine or negate the democratic rights and freedoms of others.

On the economic front, social ownership will have to be extended into the major enterprises in every significant sector of the economy including construction, engineering, armaments, land and property, shipping and chemicals, while consolidating the sectors already in public ownership. These measures would enable economic planning to develop in accordance with society's needs and objectives, combining local and sectoral consultation with centralised policy-making in strategic sectors, all under democratic control.

At the same time, socialism does not require that all economic enterprise must be confined to the public sector or to a single model of public ownership. Even as socialism is being constructed, there should be scope for small businesses, self-employment and for cooperative, voluntary and municipal sectors in the economy. However, these too must be subject to progressive laws relating to taxation, terms and conditions of employment, equal treatment and industrial democracy.

A substantial extension of democracy throughout the economy will have to take place, in cooperation with the trade unions, so that the knowledge, experience, interests and creativity of working people can be drawn fully into the processes of administration, decision-making and planning. Economic planning will also have to involve a wide range of other groups and forces in society besides government ministries and major enterprises, including local government, non-governmental organisations, consumer groups and community organisations.

In terms of advanced social policies, the overall aim must be to complete the abolition of private, privileged education and healthcare for the wealthy and the development of public services of the highest possible quality for all citizens.

Big landed estates in urban as well as rural areas must be taken into local, central and cooperative public ownership. Aristocratic titles should cease to receive any official recognition and the hereditary monarchy should be replaced by a democratically elected and accountable head of state.

THE TRANSITION TO FULL COMMUNISM

The guiding principle of wealth production and distribution during the earlier, socialist stage of communist society would be: 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their contribution'. People's material reward and status would broadly reflect their contribution to society in terms of the nature of their work, their skills and effort. This will greatly reduce the extreme inequalities promoted under capitalism.

As cooperation, planning and the full application of science and technology begin to produce an abundance of the most important goods and services in society, so the principle in the higher stage of communism – full communism – becomes: 'From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs'.

Wages and money would begin to lose their usefulness, as more of life's essentials become free or of little cost. Of course, the production, distribution and deployment of society's economic output will have to be planned to ensure that needs are met and the environment and eco-system are safeguarded.

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.

As the amount of human labour required to produce society's needs decreases, every citizen will have the time and facilities to develop her or his skills and talents to the full. The basis for many social problems and tensions will be removed, while resources of every kind are devoted to solving or alleviating individual problems and incapacities.

The victory of socialism in other countries will eventually remove the threat of capitalist restoration by outside forces.

As the danger of internal counter-revolution recedes, the role of the state as the coercive force used by one class to suppress another also diminishes.

The collective organisation of working people required to prevent capitalist restoration will be replaced by autonomous, self-governing communities of people. Workers' self-management of industry and enterprises will be free to develop its full potential. The great majority of people will increasingly understand the need to organise and fulfil essential work as the pre-condition for their freedom and the ability of all to benefit from the expansion of educational, cultural and leisure provision.

Communists do not accept that such a society is impossible to achieve or that there is a 'human nature' too negative to allow the development of socialism and communism over time.

So far in history, people's thoughts and behaviour have been shaped, distorted and exploited by their existence in class-divided societies. Even so, human beings have always displayed an enormous capacity for reason, compassion, cooperation, courage, self-sacrifice, invention and commitment to the creation of fairer and more just human societies. Are these not also characteristics of any such 'human nature'?

There is no reason why people should not comprehend that we share this Earth in common, that we are interdependent, that the individual good of the vast majority requires the collective good and that cooperation and unity is better than conflict and division.

It is capitalism that seeks to make a virtue of greed, egoism, exploitation and inequality, while claiming that these are the ruling characteristics of 'human nature'. It is capitalism that creates so much misery, destroys so many lives and now threatens the very future of human existence on this planet.

In a fully communist society, a new morality would characterise the social relations between people: the egotistical individualism of capitalism will be replaced by collective care and concern for every individual and for the full, all-round development of the human personality.

For the sake of humanity, the future is communism. ●



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