

# Challenges facing communists in Britain today



*Objective conditions for the creation of a revolutionary movement are improving, but much work needs to be done to take advantage of those conditions.*

The following article was delivered as a speech by our party's delegate to the 44th political conference, held by the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia's Prague district committee. Next week our party will be celebrating the 101st anniversary of the [October Revolution](#). As Lenin said in 1918: "The workers of the whole world, no matter in what country they live, greet us, sympathise with us, applaud us for breaking the iron ring of imperialist ties, of sordid imperialist treaties, of imperialist chains – for breaking through to freedom, and making the heaviest sacrifices in doing so." ([Letter to American workers](#), 20 August 1918) The experience of the Russian revolution, the fact that this idea spread like wildfire across the globe and sent a signal to workers of the world that there was a way out of their crisis, is reflected in the contributions of comrades here, so many of whom have told us that they are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of their communist parties this year (and therefore that workers of so many countries took up the communist struggle in the year following the Great October Socialist Revolution). All of us are trying, in one way or another, to understand what is the best way for a revolutionary party to behave in reactionary times, under the different concrete conditions that we face. Parties that have known socialism, that have held power, that have gone through the catastrophic experience of the counter-revolution, when it seemed that all was lost, are learning to regroup, to reassert the great truths of Marxism and Leninism and find a way forward. The counterpart to that is in countries like Britain, where the workers have never held power; where we have a very strong capitalist and imperialist class that has dominated the ideology and culture not only of our own domestic working class, but also, as you will know, of workers around the globe. Britain famously had an empire upon which the sun never set. The Irish tell a joke that that's because even God wouldn't trust an Englishman in the dark! We have to answer a very concrete question: how do we move forward now? Is it possible to have a revolutionary party and a revolutionary programme, strategy and tactics in such a situation? Or, as so many people, as the siren voices of imperialism will tell us, is this all just 'old hat'? Was October a historically

specific experience of a certain region of the globe – especially Russia – which has gone, and is no longer of any relevance to humanity? Marx famously wrote that periods of history come when in 40 years, nothing much seems to happen; but then moments come, mere days in which 40 years of experience are embodied in great revolutionary upheavals. Such was the Great October Socialist Revolution, which electrified the masses and showed practically the way forward – and we must never lose sight of that, comrades. And yet a *subjective* assessment of the political climate in the latter half of the 20th century can indeed lead us to feel that the outlook in the present moment is bleak, and that our tasks are insurmountable.

## Setbacks of the last 60 years

To briefly recap the events that we feel led to the catastrophe of the counter-revolution: these began with the victory of Khrushchevite revisionism and the famous so-called 'secret speech' at the 20th congress of the CPSU(B) in 1956, which led to the halving of the worldwide communist movement in single year. This was a signal of defeat for the communist forces within the USSR and of the party leadership taking the road back to capitalism. It precipitated the Sino-Soviet split and led to the desertion of the class struggle and the gradual collapse of revisionism morally, politically, and economically. It was the Khrushchevite revisionist road that led to the advent of Gorbachev and Yeltsin, and to the collapse of communism in the once mighty USSR, as well as in the people's democracies of eastern and central Europe. Capitalism was triumphal in the face of the reverses we suffered, Fukuyama famously declaring "the end of history"! Widespread anti-communist propaganda has since then led to division, disarray, and theoretical and organisational impotence in the working-class movement – in our country, as in much of the world. But class struggle of course, does continue. And in the absence of conscious communist direction, leadership of that struggle gropes forward under the leadership of 'anti-imperialist' and nationalist forms, characterised by a lack of class-consciousness, a lack of

historical perspective, and the growth of pessimism and defeatism within the working class. The imperialist bourgeoisie is happy to amplify and disseminate all such pessimistic ideas and theories, while suppressing, ridiculing and pouring scorn on the idea of a revolutionary transformation of society. Thus our immediate political climate is dominated by bourgeois ideology. We have seen in Britain the rise of bourgeois nationalism, not only in the frank form of our imperialist bourgeoisie encouraging racism and anti-immigrant sentiment, but also of the desertion of so-called 'nationalities' within Britain to their 'national tent'. We have seen in this context the rise of Scottish nationalism and the call for an independent Scotland, which we have opposed. British chauvinism has found its counterpart among immigrant communities, which are large in imperialist countries – and London in particular is a very multicultural city – in [black nationalism](#), black separatism, 'third-worldism', and so on, which also break the unity of the working class. These are ideas and movements we have to fight against.

## Workers still tied to social democracy

Overall, our experience in Britain is that the working-class movement remains dominated by [social democracy](#), which in Britain means the [Labour party](#). The so-called revolutionary counterpart to that is that in Britain we have a number of Trotskyite and revisionist 'communist' parties, which have actually always promoted the notion that in Britain a revolution is not possible, and not necessary; that getting a left-wing Labour party into government is the strategy that the working class should adopt to bring about necessary changes in society. Labour – which is a party of imperialism to its core and has shown this time and again throughout its history, both in opposition and in government. None of you will have forgotten the role of Tony Blair in waging [war in Iraq](#). This is the Labour party that these revisionist and Trotskyite 'communists' tell us is the bastion of the revolutionary future of the British proletariat! Recently the British Trotskyite and revisionist left have taken to saying that Blair and other Labour administrations were not 'real' Labour. Now we have the rise of [Jeremy Corbyn](#)! JC is a left winger, and Labour under this 'left-winger' will bring us to the promised land of socialism. Meanwhile, Corbyn's Labour, and its 'left' retinue, continue to assist in the diffusing of all social struggle; the hampering of union struggles; the hampering of any independent organisation and action of the proletariat that doesn't lead directly to a call for a parliamentary vote for social democracy – a vote

for Labour; a vote for Corbyn. The gradual merging of these 'revolutionary' opportunist groups and parties with social democracy in organisational practice (eg, their amalgamation into Momentum, and Momentum's entry into the Labour party, etc) reflects their longstanding capitulation to social democracy in theory and politics.

## Identity politics on the rise

We have seen in Britain the proliferation of divisive '[identity politics](#)' and subjective philosophy; the idea that each of us is essentially unknowable to the other; that all of our experience is unique and defines us in a way that is totally separate from class. These academic ideas have penetrated British culture and have gone to absurd extremes. There are people who claim the 'right' to be disabled, although they are able-bodied. They say: "If I feel I am disabled, I truly *am* disabled, and should have the right to an 'operation' to remove my arm and actually become disabled." Comrades think this is a joke? I hope you never have to experience the divisive and negative impact that this reactionary bourgeois obscurantism can have on the psychology of vulnerable members of the working class, and on the movement. The purveyors of identity politics demand that if I am a man who 'feels like a woman', I should have the right to self-define as a 'transgender' woman. While still minority ideas, they are given an increasingly prominent platform in our media and academia, and youth who are taken up with these ideas find themselves estranged and suicidal, without any way of expressing their real anger and frustration with life under capitalism in meaningful action that promises any way forward. These are the ideological products of a bourgeoisie that seeks only to divide and keep down the working class. We must oppose and expose these ideas. We must struggle against self-obsession and individualism in its most absurd forms.

## Objective conditions push the working class to find solutions

And yet, this apparently, and superficially hostile climate for revolutionary politics conceals deep-rooted, systemic socioeconomic conditions of [inequality](#) that cry out for sweeping change, which, despite all resistance from the ideologues of capitalism, force themselves upon society. Leninism teaches us to look for the economic essence and the class forces at work. The objective situation in fact holds strong revolutionary portent. We are living in a [world crisis of capitalist overproduction](#) that has no parallel since the Wall

Street crash of the 1920s and the great depression of the 1930s, which drove world capitalism inexorably towards the second world war. Concentration of capital has progressed to an unprecedented degree. Our former chairman [Harpal Brar](#), who in the past has addressed your conference, has written many [books on imperialism](#) in the modern day. If it's necessary for you to recapitulate and confirm that [the ideas of Lenin about imperialism](#) – about the division of the world, the [domination of banks](#), the domination of monopoly capital – is still a reality faced by the proletariat of all countries today, then I invite you to read them. From your contributions I think that the comrades here today accept this fact, but there are a few facts which do have popular resonance and encompass this message. The fact that there are three people in America, the three wealthiest US billionaires, who have the same wealth as the poorest half of the US population, notwithstanding the fact that it's the richest imperialist nation on earth; the fact that the world's eight wealthiest billionaires have more wealth than the poorest half of humanity (3.5 billion people)! The capitalist crisis moreover is further concentrating wealth and [generalising misery](#). These are facts that should excite popular outrage and anger in every quarter, and particularly among the working class. And if we are not using these disgusting facts to excite the workers to indignation and action against this fundamental economic injustice, from which every other injustice stems, then we are doing something wrong. Workers are facing, generation by generation, worse conditions, and are angered by their position. They are looking for the real culprits, and the culprits are identifiable, right before them, hiding in plain sight. It is our job constantly to point this out. Far from being a world of peace, stability and tranquillity, without the prospect for upheaval and change, even the most superficial glance around us shows that our world is in the most [profound state of upheaval and conflict](#), for it remains enmeshed in the capitalist imperialist contradictions described by Lenin a hundred years ago. First among these here is the division between workers and capitalists. Class struggle cannot cease while capital exploits wage-labour and turns the global population into its wage-slaves. British workers, since the defeat of the 1984-5 miners' strike, the collapse of the [USSR](#) and socialist democracies (which unknown to them were safeguarding the requirement for their exploiters to cut them some slack and maintain their wages and social conditions), and the deepening of the global capitalist economic crisis have seen a return to classical free-market economics. The last 30 years have

witnessed increasingly virulent attacks on their [paid wages](#) and their [social wage](#), and consequently on their ability to secure a decent and [cultured](#) life, [education](#), [housing](#), etc. The world is divided, what's more, between imperialist and oppressed nations. Britain [as an imperialist country](#) is at constant war with the world – albeit most often as a junior partner of [US imperialism](#). And we have seen that the EU increasingly plays a key imperialist role: [Yugoslavia balkanised](#); Afghanistan, Iraq/Kuwait, [Libya](#) and [Syria](#) invaded; the 'pivot to Asia'; interventions in Africa – Cote D'Ivoire; Africom – in [Ukraine](#), and all over [South and Central America](#). The US army, let's not forget, is the only army that divides its command structure and forces according to the earth's continents; *it is literally in occupation of the world*. Looking at a map of the earth's coastlines, one can see which countries US forces patrol and/or occupy militarily. Its domination is absolute. And of course this brings the US into conflict with its rivals – and even with its allies. There is renewed antagonism at this time of economic crisis between the imperialist nations. The US remains the hegemon of the imperialist world, but the crisis is eroding its leadership and prestige. There is deterioration, but not eradication, in the conditions in which the aristocracy of Labour (privileged workers) in the US and other imperialist countries – including Britain – are able to flourish. [Trump's](#) election is a symptom of this, but not the cause. Trump's moves toward [trade war](#), even with his close allies, and certainly the US's increasing hostility towards Russia and China, are a global symptom of this that we all feel. The threat from this [drive towards a real world war](#) is surprisingly immanent at all times; we only have to listen to the hysterical propaganda of our own ruling class to realise that. [Brexit](#) is another symptom of this. Workers in Britain are routinely pumped full of anti-immigrant sentiment as capitalism can offer no real answers to their problems. This [anti-immigrant hostility](#) is then used to manipulate workers at every election – including the Brexit referendum. Monopoly capital, which would prefer Britain to remain within the [European Union](#), now turns around and accuses those who voted for Brexit of being racist! Our party campaigned consistently for Brexit on the basis that it is in the working class's interest to break the alliance of European monopoly capital that the EU represents. And while this may not be the dominant narrative in the country, or in our media, it is understood by a large percentage of the British people that their interests are not represented by the EU; that they were expected to vote to remain by the establishment; and their discontent with the material

conditions they faced caused them to at least vote leave in order to throw a spanner in the works of their ruling class – and to us, that is what the vote represents. The rise of ‘populism’ is a symptom of this – not the cause. We are a small party and as yet are not composed of professional revolutionaries, but we are a growing force precisely because we feel that burning passion and hatred towards the capitalist system, and realise that the October Revolution and socialism still point the way forward. That idea has tremendous resonance with an increasing section of the disenfranchised working-class youth in Britain. We have a tremendous opportunity: 1. We are undoubtedly facing a profound crisis of the parasitic, decadent, moribund order that is [capitalism in its imperialist stage](#). 2. It remains true that [capitalism creates its own gravediggers](#). 3. Those gravediggers, the proletariat of the metropolitan centres and nations, and the peasantry and workers of the oppressed nations, are deeply affected by pernicious bourgeois ideology in many forms. The imperialist bourgeoisies themselves marvel at their own success in [dividing and subjecting](#) the working class. 4. It has never been more urgent to reassert a [materialist ideology and analysis of capitalism](#); to promote class-consciousness actively among the workers; to emphasise in our revolutionary work all that serves to enlighten the masses and weld them tightly around a vanguard organisation steeped in advanced [Marxist-Leninist theory](#). And this means opposing social-democratic compromisers with capitalism. 5. In Britain, the CPGB-ML is the only organisation struggling successfully to bring this vision to fruition, and working creatively and fruitfully to achieve this end. 6. We remain confident in the socialist future of humanity – but that future can only be won by the victorious class struggle of the proletariat, led by a vanguard revolutionary party.

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