

THE MEANING OF TRUE INTERNATIONALISM.

Before the pandemic, that is during the last three months of 2019, there were significant protests or strikes in at least 500 cities around the world each week. It was a sign of the growing political instability being generated by a world economy whose decline was becoming more pronounced. It is generally agreed, that if the working class is to liberate itself, and therefore emancipate humanity, class consciousness has to first be transformed and elevated.

One of the shackles limiting and dividing the working class are the related forms of nationalism, xenophobia, and racism. These forms of consciousness have a material origin. Depriving workers of their means of production, gives rise to a state of insecurity and disempowerment amongst workers. This is most prevalent amongst the less skilled workers where competition in the labour market is fiercest making their jobs the most precarious.

If these layers are prone to the siren song of racism and xenophobia, this is not born of stupidity, but of insecurity. Were we to address the problem as one of stupidity, we will never win these workers over, nor gain their trust. Were we to address the problem as one of insecurity and disempowerment, therefore connecting with them, then we can win their trust by offering a worthwhile and durable alternative, the fight for workers' control.

Insecurity has a corrosive effect on mental health. Disempowerment lies at the heart of nearly all mental degeneration, demoralisation, and desperation. Like a skater out of control, many workers reach out for a rail to hold on to, something familiar if not traditional. In a world being turned inside out but never the right way up, some form of footing is needed, even one provided by the enemy. That is the substance of the populist. Those who speak the same language, who have the same skin, who claim to represent continuity and traditional (national) values, even as they have their foot planted firmly on the accelerator driving change.

It is therefore no coincidence, that in Britain at least, right wing groups and parties have been led by posh boys who have had a public school education like Johnson, and who have nothing in common with those they recruit to their cause. It is therefore no coincidence that the slogan "taking back control" had such a resonance amongst these layers of workers during the Brexit debate. The importance of this slogan was understood by its creators, who after all, had created the conditions of insecurity in the first place.

The problem for those who play with slogans such as taking back control, is that they themselves are not masters or mistresses of their own house. History has a habit of teasing and mocking these hubristic gentlemen and gentlewomen. If they were the captains of an economy free of crises, they could possibly achieve their goals, but they are not.

The world economy effectively flatlined in 2019. The pandemic will have accelerated the downward trend. All the talk of using this pandemic to build a brighter, greener, levelled up future is mere hyperbole. The reality is bleaker: mass unemployment, an avalanche of insolvencies and governments staggering under the burden of debt.

Under these circumstances, those who claim to be helping workers and speaking for workers always end up attacking them as payment for the crisis becomes due. And the anger that flows from this kind of betrayal knows no bounds. That is the arena in which the ideological struggle takes place, where those who betray the working class are exposed, where the search for an alternative becomes the stuff of life. This is the amphitheatre where revolutionary words now echo up and down. This is the stage where we battle the misleaders of the working class, the political and trade union leaders who

fear a revolutionary working class more than they do an accommodating capitalist class. Let us not forget, at least in the advanced capitalist countries, that more revolutions have been derailed by these slippery misleaders, than by the force of arms wielded by the capitalist class.

A historical alternative.

If, at the heart of the condition of the working class under capitalism, is their separation from the means of production, it then follows that our central demand must be to end this separation by abolishing the private ownership of the means of production, distribution and information. The emergence of collective property in production ends the division of society into classes once and for all.

Here we quickly need to deal with the menace of anarchism. The credo of anarchism is that the state is the source of all the exploitation and oppression. From this it follows that any state, including a workers' state, would turn on the working class. Without being rude, this baby talk is the equivalent of saying that it is guns that are the killers, not the people holding and firing the guns.

The state did not give rise to private property. Private property gave rise to the necessity of the state as the instrument to protect this property together with the class who benefited from it. In turn a workers' state is needed to not only defend against counter-revolution but also to create the conditions for the emergence of a new mode of production which cannot emerge even partially formed from within the womb of capitalism.

Without a workers' state collective property cannot emerge. Only the workers' state can take into its hands the individual threads of private property and weave them into the cloth of collective property. In its absence a free for all could ensue. Workers could lay claim to their own factories. A gulf could emerge between these new owners. What would bridge this gulf? Would everything have to be negotiated rather than be governed by workers rights, and if the latter, who will institute these rights and police them fairly.

Take a supermarket. If rationing is needed because of disruption to supply chains after the revolution, who would do the rationing? The workers in the supermarket? But surely, would they not have an incentive to look after themselves and their families first? Under these conditions, would rationing be fair? It is doubtful.

The workers state is not some alienating body. Its personnel will be regularly elected and will be accountable and instantly be recallable. But only a representative body which connects society can hold it together until such time that the new society automatically reproduces itself and the structures which make it dynamic.

This is brought out when we examine collective property. And by this we mean addressing the question practically. It is true that abolishing private ownership would end unpaid labour and therefore exploitation, on the assumption that no new bureaucracy forms. But will collective property lead to fairness amongst workers? That is altogether a different question and the answer could be either yes or no.

The means of production we inherit is uneven. To understand this, we need to first define a means of production. A means of production is any instrument that amplifies the labour power (both mental and physical) of the producer. This amplification is measured by time. The greater the amplification, the faster the output, the shorter time needed to produce a product. Thus, this amplification or rise in productivity results in a reduction in the labour time needed to produce something.

Now the rub. The means of production we inherit from capitalism is uneven. Some are more modern, or organised more methodically, while others are older. Thus, the amplification of labour power is uneven creating an advantage to one set of workers and a disadvantage to others. But if collective ownership is to amount to anything, it would have to preclude advantages and disadvantages. They need to be smoothed out.

This is done by employing weighted average labour times. This weighting ensures that the balance of more productive and less productive workers is evened out. Thus, our objective pricing system based on weighted average labour times, ensures a single price per product which benefits all workers equally regardless of their productivity. Under this condition collective ownership now brings fairness to every worker.

But this is only possible because the workers in one factory do not exclusively own their means of production. They also own the means of production in all the other factories just as the workers in these factories own the means of production in their factory.. And when we all own the means of production ultimately no one owns them, they cease to become property and become, well, the means of improving and elevating society.

And when this point has been reached, the purpose of the state is spent. Given life to by property it ends its life in the absence of property. But until that glorious day, the workers state is needed to homogenise property in the means of production after the fall of private property to ensure that all workers benefit equally from the newly emergent, but flawed, means of production.

And this applies not only nationally but internationally. It is of course a source of deep annoyance to read the programmes of organisations like *Socialist Appeal* and their demand to nationalise the top corporations in the UK. Blinded by the dust of history, they seem to be unaware that the top Corporations, mainly represented by the Footsie 100, are multinational. If they ever succeeded in storming these corporations to expropriate them, all they would find would be a legal shell, smart offices with posh carpets, ornate desks and hopefully some old masters hanging on the walls.

As for the real assets of these corporations, their productive assets, these are dispersed around the world. The same applies to the production chains which are global. Even were the multinationals to restructure these chains because of their feud with China, something which will cost in excess of £1 trillion, money they do not have, they will still be international. All talk of localising production and smart factories is bunkum.

Therefore, when we are talking of weighted average labour times we always and without exception, mean internationally weighted average labour time. The price of a product will be set by this weighted time, and not by a nationally set weighted labour times. In short, no matter where a worker travels in a post-capitalist world, the price of a product will not differ.

What this means practically, is that as the more advanced capitalist countries fall to revolution, yielding up their means of production, the weighted average labour time needed to produce an item would fall. Conversely as less advanced capitalist countries join the revolution, the weighted average may rise.

This is not problematic, but fair. And because production is no longer governed by margin but by price, there are no longer any obstacles to utilising less advanced means of production, though ecological considerations may apply. The greater the output, despite a possible increase in price, the greater the satisfaction of social need.

Its not all bad news. The growth of multinational corporations has had the advantage of closing the output gap between nations. These corporations invest in the most modern production techniques in all the countries they produce in. This has helped China modernise rapidly. Additionally, a price-based investment policy, with the twin aim of both expanding production and reducing labour times, would find that investment is best directed at modernising the least efficient producers, thus once again reducing the unevenness inherited from capitalism.

This is not for tomorrow.

While it is true that very little can be achieved without abolishing private property first, it is equally true that the class struggle cannot be postponed, and that the roots of the struggle for these goals are often found in the transitional demands we raise today.

In a previous article I argued that the value of labour power in the 21st Century can no longer be valued nationally but needs to be valued internationally. Without doing so it is impossible to call for wage parity between workers in different countries who work for or supply the same multinational corporation. The best example of this dispersion is the global car industry. Toyota has plants in 26 countries, Volkswagen has plants in 21 countries and General Motors has plants in 37 countries. Over 30 countries around the world have sizeable car production plants. And yet despite this dispersion, wage rates between countries vary significantly, often between countries separated only by a river such as Mexico. <https://theplanningmotivedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2019/11/super-exploitation-pdf.pdf>

As long as wage rates differ, as long as trade unions organise nationally rather than internationally, workers will remain at the mercy of these multinationals. Corporations have always played off plants against each other until trade unions woke up to the need to unionise all plants within their country. Now we need this leap again, to build single unions representing workers in all the countries who have a common employer. Until then these multi-nationals who organise internationally will play the workers of one country off against the workers of another. We have already seen how Mexico has been used to drive down the wages of US and Canadian car workers, but despite this, the Democratic Party dominated UAW continues on its obsolete path, failing to unionise workers across the Rio Grande under the slogan “US wages for Mexican workers”. Instead, these bureaucrats have indulged in divisive chauvinistic antics such as demanding US and other car companies return car production to the USA and by accusing Mexico and others of “stealing US jobs”.

Once again, we address the major problems of our age, not as an academic exercise, but practically because capitalism has exhausted itself and is threatening our kidnapped home, this beautiful planet of ours. Internationalism is not an option, but the coming of age of the working class.

Brian Green, 23rd August 2020.