ARGUMENTS FOR COMMUNISM: INTERNATIONALISM VS NATIONALISM.

Today it seems strange to say, that in its day, nationalism was progressive. It was retrospectively progressive in relation to medieval manorialism with its patchwork of feudal estates representing an elementary and parochial level of economic organisation. Nation building swept away this patchwork creating a unified market with new enlarged borders able to support expanded production which involved the development of industry, railways, canals, communications, language, weights and measures, time keeping, a common blended language and a single currency.

Thus, at the birth of capitalism, nationalism was progressive, but as capitalism enters its twilight years it has become a blight on humanity ruining independent working-class consciousness. The Nation-state has served its historical purpose, politically, from being revolutionary, it has become counter revolutionary, and economically, from being expansive it has become constrictory.

Capitalism has overcome many obstacles. It has become more centralised, more concentrated and transnational or international if you like. But the one obstacle capitalism has never been able to overcome is dissolving the nation-state it has outgrown.

Two developments concern us about the nation-state: the rise of imperialism and the emergence of globalisation over the last thirty years. Imperialism divided the world into a handful of dominant nations and a multitude of dominated nations. In the case of the dominated nations, they answered to the imperialist nation where all the important decisions shaping their futures were made. It did not matter if imperial rule was direct through consul generals and administrations, or after World War 2, indirectly through the dollar and other financial mechanisms, the reality was that the boundaries between the Imperial states and the subordinated states were blurred.

The most advanced development of imperialism is US imperialism. This was exemplified by the growth of the US State Department during and after World War 2. *"The number of state department personnel grew tenfold, from 763 personnel in 1936 to 7,623 employees in 1946…"* The bulk of the increase was due to overseas supervision and manipulation. Outside the Soviet Union and China; the US State Department became the first world government in a way Whitehall in London never was. Together with the Breton Wood Structures and the Dollar, the US ruled supreme.

But once again it was economic developments which shaped the post-war period, and here we think of the growth of the multi-nationals. During and after the war the largest US corporations had become continental in scope. One of the drivers of the formation of the EU and the reduction in border controls was the need for the continental sized US corporations for a continental sized market in Europe in order to be profitably transplanted into Europe.

But of course, the US did not have it all its own way. Over time, with the military umbrellas in Europe (NATO) providing a dollar-based market for locally produced goods and services, Germany, Japan and South Korea were able to industrialise. For example, the hundreds of thousands of US troops based in Germany provided more Dollars than the Marshall Plan. In turn these countries together with Britain and France also developed multi-nationals. So much so that by the 1980s Japanese multi-nationals threatened to overwhelm the established US ones resulting in US retaliation beginning in 1985.

The second period – Globalisation - following the restructuring of the world economy in the 1990s, stood on two legs. Firstly, the prior emergence of multi-nationals, secondly, the collapse of the USSR

together with the opening up of China. Globalisation proper begins in the mid-1990s and concludes around 2016. With Globalisation under US hegemony, capitalism came closer than it will ever again to overcoming the confines of the nation states which their multi or transnational corporations had already undermined. This took the form of two trade treaties in the second decade of the twenty first century, the *Transpacific Partnership* or TPP and the *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership* or TTIP. Their aim was to create two giant free market regions, one straddling the Pacific the other the Atlantic. There were similarities with the European Free Market. And just as the European Commission has usurped certain rights previously reserved by the countries in the block, so these Agreements sought to usurp rights stripped out of the participating nations, only there proposals went further.

The negotiations were conducted in secret. The most contentious element was the Investor-State Dispute Settlement which removed jurisdiction over a whole host of vital issues from national governments handing them over to remote jurisdictions which were intended to be based in tax haven islands. This new jurisdiction would not be accountable, nor electable and its decisions would be final. Further, were national governments to oppose its rulings and judgements they would be subject to severe financial penalties.

These two treaties, had they been invoked, would have meant that the multi-nationals now ruled with the nation state subordinated to them. The nation-state would have become a husk with most of its important decisions being make extraterritorially. The treaties represented the pinnacle of globalisation, and their subsequent collapse marked the beginning of the end of globalisation.

Both Agreements were never enacted due to the backlash and the rise of China. The backlash was due to the discovery that these agreements were fundamentally undemocratic, and more importantly, that more of the populations would lose from these agreements than would gain from it. Brexit and Trump were the visible political reactions to the failure of globalisation to be inclusive.

Uneven and combined economic development, particularly the uneven component is the rocks on which de-nationalisation founders. Capitalism is a crisis ridden system, so its development is convulsive rather than harmonious. A case of two constructive steps forward followed by one destructive step backward. Capitalism crashes again and again into the national boundary only to fall back due to its disordered economic development.

By the end of 2015 profitability was falling once more, the wave of Chinese investment which had refloated the world economy had petered out but not before elevating China from a subcontractor economy into a global competitor with its first multi-nationals emerging. The era of globalisation was coming to an end. All the impulses for a return to reliance on the nation-state were beginning to assert themselves. The protection of home markets was back on the agenda. And in the face of waning demand and the resulting intensification of competition, more capital was needed to compete making it increasingly difficult for newcomers to enter or remain in the market.

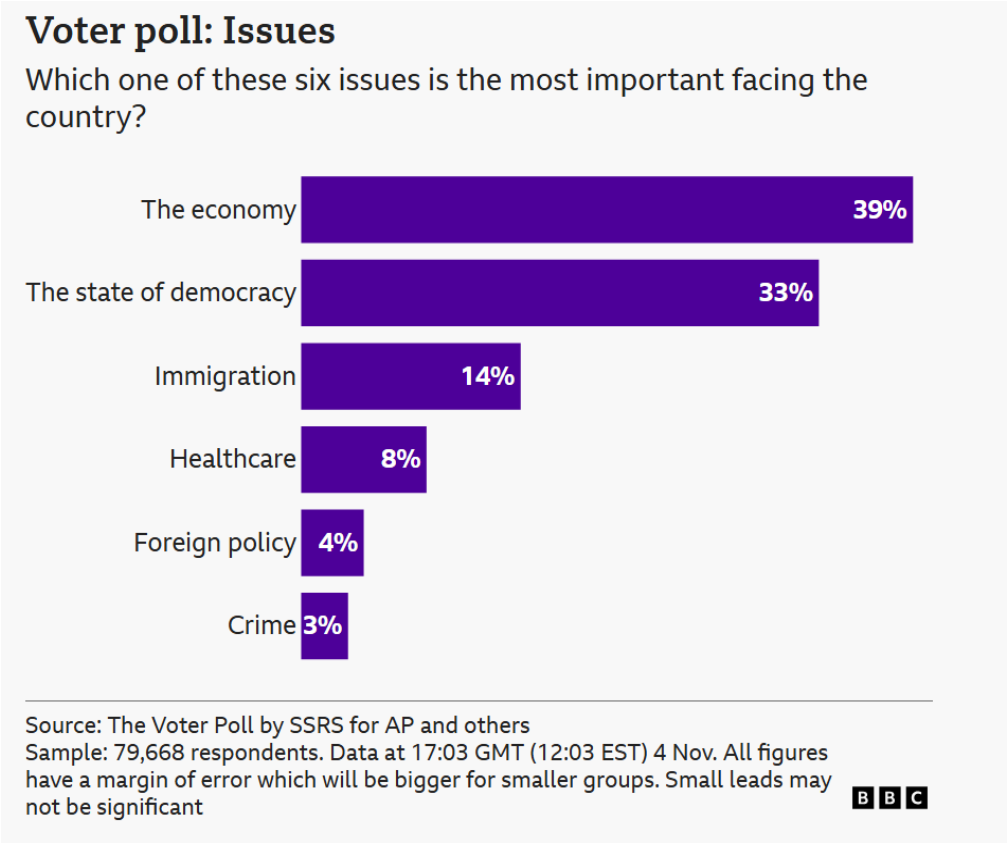
We now live in the reactionary period following Globalisation. The period dominated by a scarcity of jobs, a scarcity of homes, a scarcity of services, a scarcity of opportunity and frozen upward mobility. Externally this is not only due to a failure of globalisation but internally the result of neo-liberalism. Following the shift in the balance of power between capital and labour in the 1980s, the same arrogance and disregard which drove globalisation, also drove neo-liberalism.

Those who gained from globalisation and survived neo-liberalism still maintained a global metropolitan outlook, but those who lost out became increasing xenophobic. Migration became the key issue as workers at the lower end of the labour market and in neglected communities vented their anger at migration, and what they saw as increasing competition for jobs, housing and services.

However, the issue of migration is not set in stone. Despite 600,000 suspected migrants being arrested during Trump's second term by ICE, the lives of ordinary US workers have got worse. Despite these arrests, the rich including Trump, have got richer. Many of these US workers now realise that migration is not the key issue, but a distraction.

These workers could not be convinced that migrants weren't the real problem before the Presidential elections, that the billionaires were. Instead, they had to experience it firsthand which they have. As a result, migration has become less of an issue as this graph below shows. Crime and immigration, the Republican duet, add up to only 17% of the first choice of issue by those polled at the mid-terms. On the other hand, the economy and democracy at 72% was over four times more concerning.

Graph 1.



Europe is one electoral cycle behind the USA so right-wing parties playing the immigration card in the EU and Britain remain credible and popular.

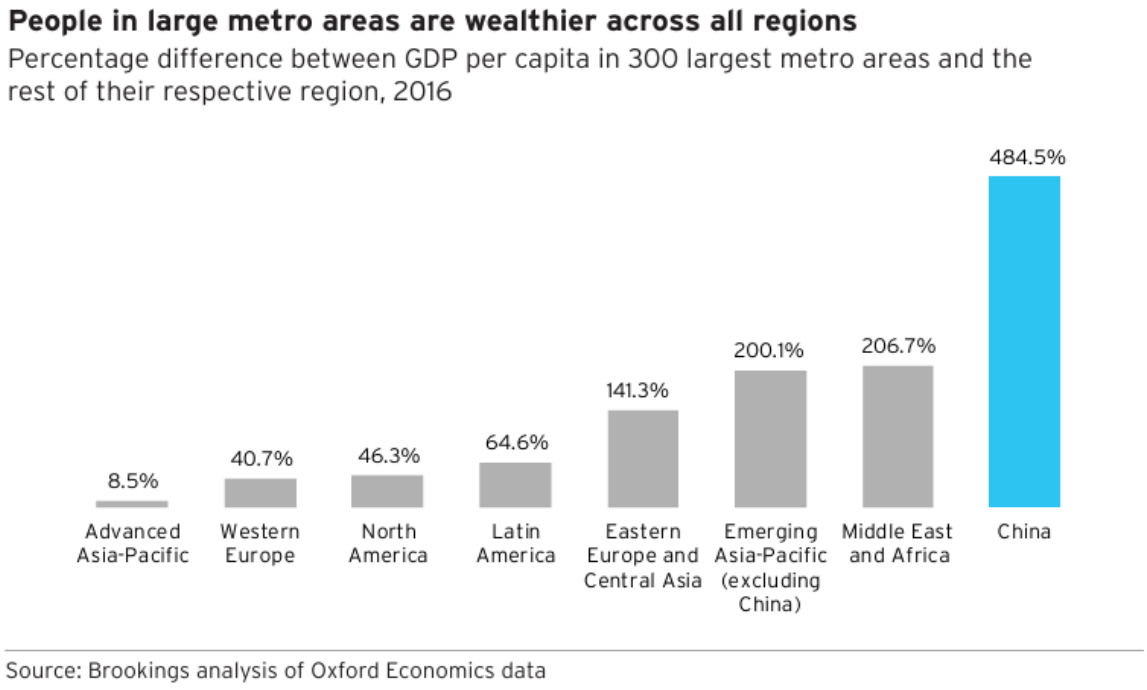
Internationalism.

There are three material conditions which restrain the growth of internationalism. The first is disempowerment, the second is that revolutionary communist consciousness needs to be brought to workers from without, thirdly the trade union bureaucracy who are absorbed into the nation state.

Disempowerment must be understood in the dialectical sense. On the one hand the reduction of workers to wage-slaves dependent on the employing class is the source of the competition which undermines unity outside the workplace. On the other hand, workers' proximity to each other in the workplace, particularly when the work is hard and horizontal, creates a shared interest in combining. It is the source of trade unionism. However, the more isolated their workplace, the more vertical the organisation, the smaller its size, the lower is the propensity to combine. Further, the more industry is hollowed out, the more reduced is the community, the greater the demoralisation, the more difficult it is to organise around production or services, the more difficult it is to find the class interest.

Secondly, communist production does not grow in the womb of capitalist production. While it is true that production has become more socialised and international this has only given rise to sporadic forms of internationalism. At the height of globalisation, the metropolitan regions in the more developed capitalist economies shared more with each other than with their hinterlands in terms of culture, mobility and standards of living. Citizens living there bought similar branded goods, formed the backbone of tourism, studied overseas and even enjoyed stints of working abroad. They were the gainers from the growing international division of labour as this graph taken from the Brookings Metro 2018 Report shows. (It covers 2014 – 2016) But they remained a minority, though a sizeable minority compared to those who lived outside these cosmopolitan regions, and further, as growing nationalism cast its shadow over the metropolitan regions it made them less accommodating towards foreigners making this form of internationalism more of a passing phase.

Graph 2.



Finally, the issue of misleaders and outright traitors in the working class. A minority can only rule a majority by coopting agents in the majority class. These agents in the UK are concentrated in the Labour Party and the Trade Unions and are commonly categorised as the Labour Bureaucracy. This caste has raised itself above the general conditions of workers resulting in the drive towards self-preservation, the stuff of betrayal.

Workers' parties defined as those which orientate towards the working class and to which the bureaucracy is affiliated, are fundamentally tied to and are loyal to the ruling class. They are permeated by the national interest which everywhere and always is the interest of the ruling class. They manage the economy in the interests of capital while throwing crumbs to the working class.

Because they represent the mystical national interest they organise on a national basis. Yes, national trade union Congresses have set up the International Trade Union Confederation, but it is an orphan despite the 171 countries affiliated to it. It was not always thus. The International Trade Union Federation set up after the Russian Revolution in 1919 did have teeth until Stalin pulled them before finally abolishing the Federation in 1949 in return for the right of veto in the Security Council of the UN which had just been set up. Clearly there is a need to rebuild an international federation of trade unions led by rank-and-file members because in a world where production is organised globally, we need to organise globally, otherwise workers will be played off one against the other.

There is only one route to internationalism and that is through the development of class consciousness. When the working class becomes a class for itself, it recognises workers have nothing in common with their ruling class but everything in common with their brothers and sisters in other countries. That the enemy is within, their own ruling class. It is only when the workers of the world turn on their own exploiters and oppressors will they stop turning on each other, only then will war between classes replace the war between nations, only then will workers fight for their own interest instead of the interests of their ruling classes. Only then will they set themselves free.

In short to overcome national divisions, class divisions must be recognised and brought to the fore. Internationalism is an inseparable facet of mature class consciousness.

Conclusion.

The problems facing humanity today are international in scale. This is particularly true for climate change. Capitalism cannot arrest global warming for a number of reasons, one of which is its inability to think globally. Competition and greed give it tunnel vision.

But workers can rise above this. They can contemplate transcontinental electrical grids connecting time zones and climatic zones. They can contemplate seeding new forests where best to grow. They can grow, cut, bury and grow again putting back into the ground what has been removed from it without being held back by the private ownership of the land. All of this is possible.

Even expropriating the capitalist class must be international in scope. Nationalising assets in one country will only see them being moved to another. The capitalist class is mobile and so is their capital.

But the very development of capitalism makes its easier to expropriate them. Today 2000 giant corporations dominate the global economy and global trade. It is more efficient to expropriate thousands of large corporations instead of millions of smaller corporations. It is simpler to plan the results. These corporations amongst others have laid the basis for a global economy. Breaking up this economy will result in a loss of productivities and economies of scale.

Production moves in the direction of socialisation and internationalisation. This is our inheritance built by generations of forgotten workers; we should not deny it but celebrate it.

Brian Green, 18th November 2026.