

Former British prime minister warns of revolution

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Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has joined the ranks of those warning of the hostility of the broad mass of the population worldwide to the entire political and economic establishment, as expressed in the British referendum vote to quit the European Union.

He expressed his fears of what that decision signified in a comment published in the *Financial Times* Monday under the title “Leaders must make the case for globalisation.”

It began: “An ugly EU referendum campaign has led to an even uglier aftermath. Historians will see the largest popular revolt against political, business and financial elites as the nearest Britain has come in centuries to a revolution. Unless we understand what lies behind it, protectionist forces will remain in the ascendant and the very existence of the UK in jeopardy.”

Brown couches his concerns in terms of the rise of right-wing populist forces. But as a former leader of the Labour Party, with decades of service to the British state in suppressing the working class, he is acutely aware of the danger that this movement can rapidly develop in a socialist direction.

According to Brown, the problems expressed in the Brexit vote have arisen because although “millions know of the costs of globalisation, few ever hear of the gains.” The emptiness of such an assertion is immediately apparent.

If the free market agenda that Brown so assiduously promoted during his time as chancellor of the exchequer, with his notorious “light touch” allowing the financial elites to run rampant, had brought material improvements in the lives of working people instead of social and economic devastation, there would be no need for a PR campaign.

Brown actually points to the real consequences of the

policies he and his counterparts around the world pursued on behalf of finance capital, both in the years leading up to the financial crash of 2008 and subsequently. As he writes: “This is not just a British problem. In country after country, the gap between the promise of globalisation and people’s day-to-day experiences of insecurity, joblessness and stalled living standards is so stark that we are bound to see more ‘take back control’ protests.”

Brown points out that in the face of this hostility, all the old political structures are breaking down, both at an international and national level.

Today’s problems, such as low growth, financial instability, deep-seated inequality and mass migration, require global solutions, he writes, “but politicians act as if such problems are best addressed by nation states acting alone and shy away from advancing the international cooperation essential for inclusive growth.”

The G20 group of major industrial economies is “widely viewed as ineffective” and the “EU has come to be regarded as part of the problem rather than the solution,” while in the major economies around the world, “mainstream parties are fighting for their very survival as old loyalties fracture.”

Brown’s “solution” consists of a grab bag of calls for action at the international and national level. As a minimum, he writes, the G20 summit in September “should show that global cooperation can make a difference.” He continues: “To reinvigorate trade and stimulate a still-sluggish world economy, it should agree a global growth pact founded on a coordinated approach to monetary and fiscal policy and structural reform.”

This is written as if everyone suffers from political amnesia, or someone pressed a reset button wiping out

all the experiences of the past seven years. At the London G20 meeting in April 2009, held under his chairmanship, measures were adopted for stimulus packages and an agreement reached that on no account should there be any resort to the kind of protectionist and beggar-thy-neighbour policies that led to a disaster in the 1930s.

But this agreement was purely temporary. It was aimed at trying to prevent a complete collapse of the financial system and had nothing to do with protecting the population from the effects of the reckless and criminal activity of the financial elites that had precipitated the crisis.

Less than a year after that meeting, with the immediate threat of financial collapse having receded, the real agenda was brought forward. In June 2010, the G20 adopted a course of “fiscal consolidation,” i.e., massive budget cuts aimed in Britain and elsewhere at imposing the costs of the financial crisis on the backs of the working class.

Coordinated policy went by the board as each major central bank pursued quantitative easing measures, pumping trillions of dollars into the financial system, benefiting the speculators and leading to ever widening social inequality. The G20 has kept its verbal commitment not to engage in restrictive trade policies, but it has been honoured in the breach amid a rise of protectionist measures largely emanating from member countries.

As for “structural reform,” which Brown maintains must be pursued, the real meaning of that phrase has become all too clear in the light of relentless attacks on jobs and social conditions.

Brown calls for a program to “make globalisation work” by promoting “upward mobility” and re-establishing the link between higher productivity, growth and improved living standards, “while tackling inequalities at source.”

This agenda--international cooperation and a boost to living standards--amounts to nothing more than a call to square the political and economic circle.

This is because the mounting problems he identifies are not the result, in the final analysis, of the motives of individual political leaders, capable of resolution if only other policies are adopted. Rather, the motives behind the motives of every set of capitalist politicians, as they carry out the demands of the corporate and

financial elites, are rooted in the very structures of the global capitalist system itself.

Capitalism is not, and never has been, a socio-economic order aimed at the production of material wealth and economic growth for the advancement of the social position of the world’s people. Its driving force is the accumulation of profit by privately owned financial and industrial corporations.

While these corporations pursue this agenda on a global scale, driven on by the unrelenting pressure of competition, they are all rooted in the nation-state system, in which each government functions as the executive committee of its “own” capitalist class. Consequently, as global growth slows, each government pursues an ever-more explicit nationalist agenda aimed at its rivals--a policy that, as history demonstrates, leads inexorably to war.

At the same time, the relentless drive for profit, under conditions of global stagnation and even outright contraction, is the impetus for deepening attacks on the working class, whose labour is the source of the fabulous wealth accumulated at the heights of society.

To “tackle inequality at its source,” as well as all the other social and economic ills that have erupted over the past eight years, requires the overthrow of the socio-economic order based on private profit and ownership and the division of the world into conflicting nation-states. This is the source of inequality. It is not a matter of lobbying for the adoption of a new mindset by the global political and financial elites that preside over the existing system.



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