Is Britain in the middle of a political crisis? The Communist Party of Britain (CPB) had its 55th Congress in November. How did it characterise the crisis?

Britain has entered a period of deepening political crisis since 2015. The key developments have been, firstly, the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour Party leader that year, after a period of intense class and popular struggle against imperialist wars and the austerity policies of New Labour, Tory minority and majority governments. This marked a shift to the left at the top of the labour movement, given Corbyn’s long record as a principled socialist and anti-imperialist who takes part in extra-parliamentary action. Secondly, the defeat of the Tory government and the majority section of finance monopoly capital in the EU referendum of June 2016 by voters who rejected austerity and wanted Britain to regain full control over economic and immigration policy-making. Thirdly, the failure of the Tories backed by big business to win a parliamentary majority at the 2017 General Election, where a left-led Labour government made major gains. Now, fourthly, the failure so far of the pro-EU Tory government to win a majority for its pro-EU ‘Brexit’ deal with the EU either among MPs—the majority of whom would prefer to keep Britain fully in the EU—or among the electors, most of whom either want to be fully out of the EU and its Single Market and Customs Union rules or fully in. Millions more people no longer believe ruling class propaganda and do not trust the political elite.

Could you please explain for our readers what the main outcomes of the CPB’s 55th Congress were?

Our Congress was overwhelmingly united around the anti-imperialist, anti-NATO and anti-EU perspectives of our programme Britain’s Road to Socialism, and for continuing to build a popular democratic anti-monopolist alliance led by the working class and its labour movement—including the Communist Party—that fights for the policies of a Left Wing Programme. The strategic next step is to win the earliest possible election of a left-led Labour government based on mass struggle and a higher level of political class consciousness. Imperialism has entered a new phase of contradictions and crisis on every front—economic, environmental, social, cultural and political—which the major imperialist powers led by the USA and including Britain and the main EU states are trying to resolve through intensified exploitation at home and abroad (‘neoliberalism’), political coercion, cultural control and where necessary military aggression. Imperialism’s main objectives are to contain the economic challenge from China, roll back the anti-imperialist and progressive advances in Latin America, maintain domination in Africa and exert control over the world’s main natural
resources and trade routes—hence the ‘pivot to Asia’ and aggressive interventionist strategies across the Greater Middle East region. Our party’s 55th Congress therefore placed great emphasis on the need for anti-imperialist solidarity—especially with the peoples of Palestine, Syria, Iran, Venezuela and progressive movements everywhere—and for strengthening the cohesion and unity of the international Communist movement.

3 The left in Britain believes that in order to address the key issues facing the working class, the Tories should be forced out, a general election held and a left Labour government elected. How likely is this to happen?

In Britain, we face one of the most experienced, most wealthy and ultimately ruthless ruling classes in the world. Its ideological influence remains deeply embedded in the working class, its labour movement and the Labour Party, although weakened by recent developments. The current political crisis will almost certainly result in a General Election sooner rather than later; after all, we have minority rule by a Tory Party that itself is deeply divided. If so, there will a massive propaganda offensive against the prospect of a government led by Prime Minister Corbyn and Chancellor of the Exchequer John McDonell. Although more of the new Labour MPs will be socialists, the majority of Labour MPs will continue to be pro-NATO, pro-imperialist and in many cases not even social-democrats. A new stage would then be reached in the political class struggle not only within society and the British state—where the national question raised by Scotland and Wales will assume even greater importance—but also within the labour movement. The role of a stronger, more influential Communist Party and its left and popular unity alliances including that around the daily Morning Star newspaper would then be critical.

4 Why does the CPB support Britain leaving EU? Would leaving the EU benefit British people? Which classes or strata would be the beneficiaries and/or losers?

The EU has been constructed in the common interests at home and abroad of the monopoly capitalists of France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Belgium by their hired politicians and state officials. Its chief political objectives have always been to combat socialism. This explains the pro-capitalist market, monetarist, anti-democratic and now pro-NATO class character of the EU’s rules and institutions enshrined in its two basic treaties. This, in turn, explains why most big business organisations and mainstream conservative, Christian Democrat, liberal and social democratic parties across Europe support the EU (some with the illusion that it represents a more liberal and progressive form of capitalism). We are clear—as is the British ruling class—that the rules and most powerful institutions of the EU (the Commission, Court of Justice and European Central Bank) would be used to block a left-led Labour government’s policies of renationalisation, state aid to industry, state-backed investment in infrastructure, progressive international trade deals, direction of capital, regional development, public procurement reform, restructuring of VAT and legislation to regulate the labour market and end the super-exploitation of migrant workers. Such policies would modernise and diversify the economy, create secure and well-paid jobs, boost social benefits and pensions, strengthen trade unions and collective bargaining and in other ways benefit the mass of the people—while making inroads into the wealth and power of the most parasitic, exploitative and anti-social elements of monopoly capital.
Considering the developments in the UK Parliament on Tuesday and Wednesday last week [January 15 & 16]—the heavy defeat of government’s agreed deal with the EU and defeat of the vote of confidence in the government—what are the prospects for a progressive outcome on Brexit?

The prospects have probably weakened, at least in the short-term—hence the favourable response from the Bank of England and the City to the recent votes. However, the ruling class still has to find a way to avoid a real Brexit on March 29 when, as set out in the EU (Withdrawal) Act, the UK is due to leave the EU. This means either agreeing a new exit agreement with EU before than—which would probably bind Britain even more closely to EU rules than the agreement rejected on January 15—or jointly with the EU extending the notice of withdrawal under Article 50. Such an extension would allow more time for a new “bogus Brexit” deal to be negotiated and approved in the Commons, or for a second referendum to be held that might endorse that deal or cancel Brexit altogether. While they have the reactionary intention of blocking a real Brexit, and might succeed in doing so, any of these courses of action also risk deepening the division in the Tory Party to the point of a split. This makes it all the more necessary to maintain the pressure for an early General Election to throw the Tories out. There are important reasons other than Brexit why we need a left-led Labour government urgently!

How do you evaluate the fact that the leader of the Labour Party rejected the invitation from Teresa May for consultation on Brexit unless she set aside the option of ‘No Deal’ and simultaneously the Government starting publicised discussions with senior Labour MPs known for their hostility to Jeremy Corbyn?

Instead of projecting the pro-EU “No Deal” position, it might have been better for Corbyn to insist on a different condition—namely, that she will call an immediate General Election. It has been clear all along that there are anti-socialist, pro-EU and pro-NATO Labour MPs who would try to use the EU withdrawal issue to undermine Corbyn’s position and create a party leadership crisis as well as sabotaging Brexit. Their loyalty to capitalism, British imperialism, the EU, NATO and nuclear weapons far exceeds any commitment to the working class and the labour movement. They represent a serious obstacle to the election and future progress of a Labour government and any of its left-wing policies. But to remove them will require higher levels of mass struggle and labour movement politicisation to take place, in which the trade unions, the People’s Assembly, the peace movement, the Morning Star and the Communist Party have vital roles to play.

Given the massive reliance of the British economy on finance capital and globalisation, which exerts powerful political influence, how might a left-oriented Labour Party government make real fundamental progressive changes to the British economy? Might not its role at best be limited to rolling back Neo-liberalism and adopting the Keynesian approach?

Rolling back neoliberalism and adopting Keynesian-type policies would be a start. A much bigger public sector in industry, transport and the energy utilities could be used to promote more balanced, sustainable and technologically advanced development. But state-created deficit financing need not be limited to periods of actual or even imminent recession. And the pressures that can arise from traditional Keynesian policies—inflation, relatively unproductive jobs, excessive national debt, foreign
exchange attacks on the currency, then higher short-term interest rates, lack of private long-term investment in the productive economy, etc.—require a full spectrum of preventative and remedial policies that challenge the interests and prerogatives (the ‘freedoms!’) of monopoly capital. That’s why past and future Labour governments that attempt to stand still on the basis of Keynesian policies are always doomed to defeat, usually after going back to more orthodox monetary policies and thereby disillusionsing elements of working class and left-wing support. That’s why, too, Britain’s Road to Socialism makes clear that a left-led Labour government could mark only the first stage in a revolutionary process. It would have to be transformed into a left government based on a majority of Labour, socialist and communist MPs, supported and controlled by a mass movement committed to an alternative economic and political strategy and a left-wing programme, using new as well as existing but reformed structures to turn government office into state power. This process would also need to be reflected across what would have to become a federal Britain, with similar allied governments and mass movements in Scotland, Wales and most if not all of the regions of England.

Can a left-oriented Labour Party government make any real change to British foreign policy, especially with respect to the Middle East region?

This would require a transformation in the political character of the Parliamentary Labour Party for any such change to be fundamental, comprehensive and durable. At the moment, popular support could be won by a Labour government and the peace movement against British involvement in military adventures in the Middle East and elsewhere. Based on his record, Corbyn opposes imperialist war just as he has always opposed Britain’s possession of nuclear weapons and membership of NATO. However, as we understand from Lenin in particular, imperialism is not this or that policy that can be turned on and off. It’s a whole system that will only end when it is challenged and overthrown. For that, it will not be enough to have a socialist leader of the Labour Party. We will need a mass anti-imperialist peace movement in which Britain’s Peace Assembly (affiliated to the World Peace Assembly) plays an influential role, an anti-imperialist labour movement and mass campaigning initiatives such as the People’s Assembly to work together in an alliance that can produce and control an anti-imperialist majority in our parliaments. Such a perspective cannot be realised unless we also build a powerful Communist Party in Britain, rooted in the working class, promoting Marxist-Leninist understanding, organised on every front of struggle, bringing unity and clarity and direction, drawing on its full participation in the international organisation of Communist and workers’ parties.