

Why Socialists Oppose the EU

By Michael Barker

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For my loving family

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Introduction

Fear and the Class Nature of the European Union

Capitalism is a harbinger of eternal war, not of peaceful coexistence. Socialism on the other hand – counter to the beliefs of its Capitalist and Stalinist distorters – demands that the rule of the many should be exerted democratically over the violent greed of the few. These aspirations have always driven a stake of fear deep into the psyche of the world’s warmongers.

Especially in the wake of Hitler’s defeat in 1945, European capitalists intensified their efforts to undermine socialist movements. These clamouring elites were of course particularly perturbed by the Soviet Union’s historical role in enabling the triumphant victory over the Nazis. But they were also very concerned that the momentous Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was still providing inspiration to workers seeking an alternative to the perpetual horrors of capitalism.

Elite powerbrokers from across Europe consequently linked arms with the globe’s new imperial paymaster, America (some reluctantly, some less so). These elites happily entered into political alliances with various dictatorial regimes (like those

in Greece, Portugal and Spain) to crush the organised forces of the working-class. A particularly violent example of this saw members of the British and American ruling-classes lend a helping hand to the slaughter of around 500,000 Indonesian trade unionists and socialists in the winter of 1965–66.¹

With right-wing Labour leaders all too often acting as willing servants of corporate power, the labour movement has always had to fight against European elites with one arm tied behind its back. Denis Healey, for example, (the former Chancellor and then Shadow Foreign Secretary of the Labour Party) provides an especially clear example of just one such red Tory. Healey, like many elites engaged in the class-war, took his duties very seriously, whether that be in facilitating the Labour Party's purge of socialists (in the 1980s), or by arguing in favour of Britain's integration within the EU bosses club. Thus, in the case of the EU project, instead of forging democratic links between workers across borders, global elites – with the help of Labour right-wingers of all nationalities – have constructed an undemocratic amalgamation of capitalist states.

In the post 1970 period, elite efforts to expand and consolidate the powers of the Employers Union assumed an even more important function for the transnational business elite as they looked towards the EU project as a vital means of shoring-up their declining profits. Since then, Europe's ruling elites have been unrelenting in their coordinated attacks upon the working-class –

¹ Geoffrey Robinson, *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965–66* (Princeton University Press, 2018).

with wage restraint and austerity becoming new European norms.

Socialists, as always, have countered efforts to eviscerate working-class solidarity by striving to organise co-ordinated industrial action across Europe. But in the face of a weakened labour movement, and the active betrayal of the working-class by a vast array of social democratic leaders, the fight for socialist unity against the EU project has faltered somewhat in recent decades.

Nevertheless, capitalism has no long-term answers to the violent instability that their exploitative system inflicts upon ordinary people across Europe (or anywhere else for that matter). So, with economic crises still wreaking havoc across the world, the future of the EU now hangs by a thread, and change is certainly coming – whether it be socialism or barbarism.

In 2015 the people of Greece bravely stood up to the EU but were promptly and needlessly sold-out by SYRIZA. The battle for justice against both the EU and the Spanish State continues to gather force in Catalonia. On a more local level, Jeremy Corbyn, a life-long critic of the EU, broke new ground when he assumed the leadership of the Labour Party in 2015. This victory for socialist politics in Britain was then followed by the 2016 EU Referendum which provided a sucker-punch to the ruling-class and to the imposition of EU austerity across the Eurozone.

Yet despite the British labour movement's success in propelling a socialist to the head of the Labour Party, Corbyn has already made many mistakes. One especially significant error being his failure to lead a class-based campaign against the EU.

Compounding this problem, Corbyn has also failed to take decisive action against the representatives of capitalism who still dominate the leadership of the Parliamentary Labour Party. This is a worrying fact, especially considering that a General Election looms on the immediate horizon, and that it is entirely possible that if elected to power, Corbyn will be aiming to oversee a socialist Brexit against the wishes of the many of lieutenants of capitalism who will populate his own government.

What will happen if a Corbyn-led government comes to power is still an unknown factor, and there is no knowing how far left he could be pushed by a righteously expectant working-class. This is precisely why fear is dripping from every pore of the European ruling-class. They attack and malign Corbyn at every turn, and they will never relent, so long as he holds forth to socialist ideas.

Socialism is totally incompatible with the ruling-class ideology that constitutes the very DNA of the EU. This is also why nothing less than a united struggle for socialism must be waged across Europe and the world. To do anything less would be to capitulate to our class oppressors and cede ground to the barbarism of the far-right – a far-right whose opportunism is presently allowing them to make electoral gains only because the traditional parties of the working-class have moved to the wrong side of the battle lines in the ongoing class-war.

Here follows then are a collection of essays that I published online between April 2016 and November 2018 as part of my own contribution towards seeking to explain why socialists oppose the EU.

April 4, 2016

Why Socialists Oppose the EU

Speaking in the Dáil in March 2016, Anti-Austerity Alliance TD, Paul Murphy (Dublin South West) made a strong case for leaving the EU, explaining:

“There have been many low points for the European Union over the past few years, including the campaign of terror unleashed against the Greek people for daring to stand up to the troika’s austerity, the fiscal treaty outlawing any policies other than Thatcherism, and the silent coups led by the European Central Bank against the Greek and Italian Governments, but regardless of how low the Taoiseach [Prime Minister] and the other European leaders have previously gone, they have now managed to go lower with this agreement with Turkey. To be blunt, it is an agreement to breach the basic human rights of some of the most vulnerable people in the world, namely, those fleeing Syria. It is an agreement for the mass expulsion of refugees from Greece and an agreement to outsource keeping refugees out of Europe to an authoritarian regime with a record of ongoing and systematic abuse of human rights. It is an agreement to turn Turkey and, apparently, a supposedly safe area of Syria into a prison camp for those fleeing war in the Middle East.

“I am sure that most of the leaders of the European Union look down their noses at the right-wing, anti-migrant populism of Donald Trump. I am sure they laugh

at the idea of him saying that he will force Mexico to pay for the construction of a wall to keep migrants out, but they are no better than him. This agreement is the equivalent of paying Mexico to build a wall to keep migrants out. The European Union is agreeing to turn Turkey into a wall to keep migrants out to protect fortress Europe...

"Turkey has a horrific human rights record. It is a country that is currently guilty of returning refugees to Iraq and Syria, a country guilty of not giving refugee status to those who are fleeing Syria. This is the country to which EU border control is being handed. People will have seen the videos of Turkish coast guards deliberately trying to capsize boats of refugees attempting to reach Europe. Blood will be on the hands of EU leaders, as it currently is, if they proceed with this..."

As Clive Heemskerk surmised in the pages of *The Socialist* (2009):

"The EU, from its inception to today, is an agreement between the different national capitalist classes of Europe, with the aim of creating the largest possible market for the big European multinational corporations. Each treaty, from the 1957 Treaty of Rome that created the European Economic Community, has developed and enhanced a Europe-wide market, with pan-European regulations and commercial law..."

"International solidarity and international planning are necessary. But that does not mean support for the EU!

'Internationalism' does not mean workers supporting 'their' ruling class in whatever agreement is made with the capitalist classes of other countries. If it did, then supporting agreements like NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, would be 'internationalism'..."

Jeremy Corbyn too has spent most of his parliamentary career expressing his concerns about the democratic deficit that is part and parcel of the EU. For instance, on October 24, 2011, Corbyn was one of just 20 Labour MPs who defied his Party whip to support the parliamentary calls for a EU Referendum.

Similarly, during the 2015 Labour leadership contest, Corbyn made it clear at a GMB hustings that: "I would advocate a No vote if we are going to get an imposition of free market policies across Europe..." At another debate, broadcast on *Sky News*, he said:

"I'm concerned about the way in which the European Union is increasingly operating like a free-market across Europe, tearing up the Social Chapter, damaging the working class and workers interests across Europe, hiding tax evasion in Luxemburg and other places, and secretly negotiating a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. I think we as a Party need to be making strong demands on defending and expanding the Social Chapter, defending and expanding workers' rights across Europe, and chasing down these approved tax havens that exist by the European Union all across Europe, and asking some serious questions about the way they've treated the people of

Greece and other countries by the imposition of austerity measures.”

With Corbyn’s subsequent election as Labour’s new leader, Chuka Umunna, who had previously been Labour’s Shadow Business Secretary, “said he wouldn’t serve in the Shadow Cabinet because Corbyn refused to rule out campaigning to leave the EU.” The following day, Shadow Foreign Secretary Hilary Benn then made it clear that the Labour Party would be campaigning to stay in the EU with Corbyn’s full support.² Although clearly a set-back for the left, this backtracking on Corbyn’s part is hardly surprising considering the opposition he faces from the majority of the Blairite members of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

As left-wing trade union lawyer John Hendy has observed, there can be no doubt that “the EU has adopted an assault on collective bargaining, in particular industry-wide collective bargaining.” He went on to note how in numerous cases “the Court

² Writing in April 2016, Hannah Sell explained: “It is not an objective change in the EU, but pressure from big-business in Britain, via the right-wing of the Labour Party, that has led Jeremy Corbyn to change his position.

“Back in September last year, just three days after telling David Cameron he would not give him a blank cheque on the EU referendum, Jeremy Corbyn signed a letter that did just that. Co-signed by foreign secretary Hilary Benn it promised to call for a yes vote regardless of the outcome of Cameron’s negotiations with the EU.

“This was the result of the right’s first major attack on the new Labour leader with Pat McFadden, then shadow Europe minister, threatening to resign unless the letter about the referendum was signed.” (“Jeremy Corbyn’s EU u-turn,” *The Socialist*, April 20, 2016.)

of Justice of the EU has held that the right to bargain collectively (and with it the right to strike to uphold collective agreements) does not take precedence over the economic freedoms of business — save where certain stringent conditions are met.”

It is precisely for such reasons that lead Henty to conclude:

“The EU has become a disaster for the collective rights of workers and their unions. It is essential that the institutions of international human rights law be upheld; it is yet more vital that working people and trade unions across Europe achieve the solidarity necessary to prevent the further depredations of the EU.”

May 15, 2016

How Labour Came to Love the EU

With a longstanding interest in the history of the European Union, Dr Andy Mullen is a Senior Lecturer in Politics at Northumbria University in Newcastle upon Tyne whose forthcoming book is titled *Anti- and Pro-European Propaganda in Britain*, a follow-up to his other recent co-authored book *The Political Economy of the European Social Model*. Dr Mullen’s first major research on the nexus between socialism and the European Union was however his PhD: “The British Left’s ‘Great Debate’ on Europe: The Political

Economy of the British Left and European Integration, 1945–2004” (University of Bradford, 2005). Here follows are some snippets of information from a recent reading of this highly informative and exhaustively documented manuscript.

“Labour’s European policy oscillated according to whether the party was in or out of power. In opposition, between 1959 and 1966, it was against entry. In government, between 1966 and 1970, it was in favour. In opposition, between 1970 and 1974, it was against. In government, between 1974 and 1979, it was in favour. In opposition, from 1979 until 1988, it was against. To explain the pattern, which persisted until 1988, it is necessary to understand that, in government, the Labour leadership was under considerable pressure from the pro-EU Foreign Office. In opposition, however, the rank and file tended to reassert itself, as it did post-1970, and it was invariably more sceptical of the EU than the party leadership.” (p.261)

In October 1983 Neil Kinnock, a long-standing opponent of the EU, was elected Party Leader. Now, however, he became an evangelist for the EU as he proceeded to move the Party away from the influence of the rank-and-file to embrace the policies that would later become identified with New Labour (for more on this toxic history read the excellent book *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory: Inside Kinnock’s Labour Party*).

Kinnock quickly threw his support behind Stuart Holland’s pro-EU ‘Out of Crisis’ project (that had been founded in 1981). Holland represented the Vauxhall constituency in Lambeth,

London, from 1979 until 1989, and soon after leaving Westminster (where he had served as the shadow financial secretary to the Treasury) he went on to work for the President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors. Here it is important to recall that it was...

“Delors’ speech to the 1988 TUC Congress contained the allure of a ‘social Europe’, which many within the Labour Party and trade union movement found attractive. Post-1988 the EU was seen by many Labour and the TUC members as a means to advance socialism. Pro-EU forces claimed that the Social Chapter would benefit workers, that ‘social dialogue’ would transform industrial relations, that the Single Market presented new opportunities, and that the EU was essential to tackling unemployment.” (p.270)

It is noteworthy that in 2010 Stuart Holland would coauthor the book, *A Modest Proposal for Resolving the Eurozone Crisis*, with Yanis Varoufakis.

Returning to Kinnock and his right-wing friends and their collective efforts to ditch anti-EU sentiment (and working-class concerns more generally):

“To counter the widespread anti-US feeling within the [Labour] party, in 1985 right-wing Atlanticist forces created the British-American Project for the Successor Generation (BAP). Composed of over 600 leaders and opinion formers, the BAP, allegedly funded by the CIA, was established to ‘perpetuate the close relation-

ship between the two countries established by an earlier generation'. BAP members included Peter Mandelson, Mo Mowlam, Geoff Mulgan, Jonathan Powell, George Robertson, Chris Smith, Matthew Taylor and Liz Symons, all members of the right-wing network that helped to 'modernise' and Europeanise the party." (p.139)

Although such activities are rarely talked about within the Labour movement, The Militant (now Socialist Party) published a useful pamphlet in 1982, *CIA Infiltration of the Labour Movement*, which helped expose the right-wing forces acting against socialists. As Dr Mullen writes:

"The [British and US] intelligence agencies... renewed their support for the pro-EU social democratic network within the Labour Party and trade union movement, manifest in their funding of the SDP in the 1980s and the BAP in the 1990s. The objective of the former, according to [Tony] Benn, was to destroy the possibility of a Labour government committed to withdrawal from the EU, plus other radical policies, whilst the objective of the latter was to ensure that the Labour Party returned to the control of pro-EU Atlanticist forces." (p.275)

...

"[Tony] Benn argued [in a 2002 interview] that sections of the left opposed the EU because it was 'a capitalist club arming itself to see that no socialist ideas penetrated, and no communist armies invaded.' He further alleged that the pro-EU right within the Labour Party,

together with the SDP, supported European integration as means to 'finally legislate socialism out of existence.'" (p.266)

...

"No British government, whether Conservative or Labour, has conducted a cost-benefit analysis of EU membership. Nevertheless, during the Cold War period the Labour Party and the TUC issued a number of policy documents that contained empirical analyses of the impact of entry, and then continued membership, on Britain's economy and its political system. However, the post-1988 period, following the reversal of support for withdrawal by the Labour Party and the TUC, witnessed the publication of policy documents that contained little if any empirical analysis. Instead, they offered negative arguments (such as 'there is no alternative' to the EU), aspirations (pledging support for a 'European social model' whilst New Labour actively blocked progressive EU directives) and emotional exhortations (such as membership of the EU is Britain's destiny). These themes were commonplace in Labour Conference and TUC Congress debates during the post-1988 period." (p.268)

New Labour "also abandoned any belief in an interventionist economic policy" and in an interview conducted in 2003, former Kinnock operative, Bryan Gould noted that:

"Historically, the left took the view that it was an important function of government to be able to run the

economy in the interests of the people that elected them. Today's orthodoxy, by contrast, is that the government should just hold the reins and maintain the value of the currency, and hand over all these decisions, which are said to be purely technical, over to a central bank, and the bigger the bank, the bigger the economic area, the better." (cited in Mullen, p.268)

In a later book chapter based upon the research undertaken for his PhD that appeared in *Implications of the Euro: A Critical Perspective from the Left* (2006) Dr Mullen concludes that while the Labour Party "remains divided on the issue" of the EU, "the balance of argument favours those who are sceptical of and/or opposed to the European Union." He points out that one of the important arguments for rejecting the EU relates to...

"...the illusion of the 'European social model' and the false choice between this and the US model of capitalism. Across the European Union, public sectors and welfare systems are being systematically privatised and dismantled by member states as a result of the Single Market, euro and enlargement projects. In short, the European Union is pursuing a neo-liberal rather than a Keynesian project, under which multinational companies (MNCs) are the driving force. [The authors of *Europe Inc.* (2000)], for example, found a significant relationship between the recommendations of reports produced by the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT), composed of captains of industry from EU-based MNCs, and the policy and treaty output of the European Union. Similarly, [Caroline Lucas and

Colin Hines in their report *From Seattle to Nice: Challenging the Free Trade Agenda at the Heart of Enlargement* (2000)] highlighted the role of the ERT in the enlargement process. At best, the European Union places considerable constraints on governmental freedom of action, manifest in the euro (SGP) rules for example. At worst, the European Union could overrule and block the implementation of a socialist programme mandated by the British electorate.” (p.35)

May 22, 2016

Islamophobia, the EU, and the Real Preachers of Hate — Britain First

Britain First, a toxic split-off group from the British National Party, were unsuccessful in launching their EU campaign here in Leicester yesterday. Members of the public stood their ground in challenging Britain First's anti-immigrant propaganda and their ill-informed hatred of Muslims, and so the police had to step in to better enable them to continue distributing their hate-filled paraphernalia.

Soon an ever-growing crowd encircled the preachers of hate, which left the shaven thugs with not much to do except stand waving their huge union jack flags, until the angry crowd

grew to such a size that they were escorted back to their car by the police.

Clearly a central pillar of far-right groups like Britain First is their ability to confuse themselves. Picking up and amplifying the misleading narrative that runs through much of the right-wing national press, and even the liberal media, such divisive groups blame all the world's problems on immigrants.

Needless to say, they neglect to focus on the real causes of Britain's problems, which is the fact that, over the past four decades or so, successive governments have served to enrich the 0.1% elite at the expense of the rest of us.

Let's remember that the main rate of corporation tax in the UK was 52% in 1980, and is now just 18%. This is not to mention the criminal amount of tax avoidance that is openly carried out right under the noses of our government, which has meant that around £120 billion a year is stolen from the British working class.

Here it is important to note that while Jeremy Corbyn, as the new leader of the Labour Party, may oppose such systemic corporate cronyism, almost the entirety of the parliamentary leadership of the Labour Party still prefers to actively serve the needs of the corporate business class before those of the working class.

A perfect example is provided by the newly elected Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who during his election campaign vowed to be "the most pro-business Mayor London has ever had", and who, since being elected, aggressively attacked Corbyn for his commitment to socialist ideas.

Facts like these of course matter little to Britain First. Sadiq Khan is a "dangerous Islamic extremist," they say in a video

describing how London “has fallen” to the Muslims, adding that Khan was “pushed to the forefront by the new Left-wing extremist fringe that has taken over the Labour Party.” Simple obvious truths elude Britain First once again!

It is little surprise that Britain First’s so-called anti-EU campaign is equally nonsensical. They say they are defiantly campaigning against “a leftwing EU superstate” and they warn “Every leftist and liberal is crawling out from under every rock to ruin our chances of making our country great again.”

They neglect to mention that socialists have a long track-record of opposing the bosses club that is the EU; indeed, Jeremy Corbyn himself has spent his whole working life opposing the EU precisely because it serves the interest of the super-rich and enforces austerity upon Europe.

The irony is that now Corbyn has become the leader of the Labour Party his right-wing colleagues in Parliament have been able to force him to campaign to stay in the EU.

June 8, 2016

Green Mistakes on the EU Trail

Members of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) who are presently campaigning to leave the EU have always made our socialist reasons for exit abundantly clear. In this respect we have been totally opposed to campaigning in coalition alongside right-wing politicians who carry through the same austerity agenda at home as the EU carries out across Europe.

The same is not true for the Green Party, who are apparently eager partners with Labour and the Tories within Britain Stronger in Europe. Caroline Lucas' two accomplices at last week's pro-EU event in Leicester were none other than Liz Kendall and Vince Cable ("Vince Cable, Liz Kendall and Caroline Lucas set out Remain arguments in Leicester," *Leicester Mercury*, June 2)

Bizarrely the *Mercury* reported the latest Kendall mis-truth with her saying: "There is not a single credible organisation that thinks we will be better off if we left the EU." This of course is nonsense, as there are many credible organisations campaigning to leave the EU, like for instance the Baker's Union, which is affiliated to the Labour Party. One can only hope that during the discussion Lucas took the time to correct Liz Kendall for this scare-mongering oversight.

How times change, when Lucas was interviewed about her views on Vince Cable just last year she said people shouldn't vote for him for the following reasons:

“Because his party’s record on upholding the values he says motivate him is pretty abysmal. When you think of the role they’ve played in propping up a government that has rolled out the most brutal austerity measures to some of the poorest people in society, it’s hard to square that with his values.”

Despite the Green Party’s progressive policies on many issues, much good work is being undone by their ongoing collaboration with the very political institutions that seem dedicated to destroying the planet and promoting austerity.

For example, Lucas recently put her name to Britain Stronger in Europe’s eco-pamphlet titled “10 Green Reasons for Remaining in Europe”; the other co-authors of this ill-informed pamphlet were Ed Milliband, Ed Davey, and the Tory environmental secretary, Liz Truss.

Controversially Truss has regularly affirmed her personal commitment to the immensely destructive practice of fracking, seemingly at any cost to the environment, and:

“In 2009, as deputy director of the free-market thinktank Reform, Truss said energy infrastructure in Britain was being damaged by politicians’ obsession with green technology. ‘Vast amounts of taxpayers’ money are being spent subsidising uneconomic activity,’ she said.”

More worrying is the content of “10 Green Reasons for Remaining in Europe,” which boasts about the EU’s openly pro-business commitment to protecting the environment, something of which

the Green Party is usually highly critical. For example, Lucas' co-authored pamphlet boasts:

“The EU's Emissions Trading Scheme is a key tool to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from industries across Europe at the lowest cost.”

But despite Lucas putting her name to this misleading statement, the Green Party's own energy policy is dismissive of this scheme, bluntly and accurately referring to it as the “discredited EU-Emissions Trading Scheme (EU-ETS) that has been so ineffective at reducing emissions”.

To take just one other obvious problem with the pamphlet, it notes that the EU “has been at the forefront of environmental milestones, from the UN Climate Convention, the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement last year.”

But as Caroline Lucas wrote last year, the Paris Agreement can be considered just so much hot air given Liz Truss' vocal commitment to fracking. As Lucas explained:

“If the government is to match its rhetoric on the climate deal struck in Paris then ministers must urgently rethink their entire approach to energy policy. To have any realistic chance of keeping global warming to well under 2 degrees we need to ban fracking in the UK”

The Green Party have of course been highly critical about the toothless nature of the agreements previously reached by elites at the UN Climate Convention and the “weak and feeble” Kyoto

Protocol (as noted by the Alliance for Green Socialism). Or as the Green Party chairperson wrote in 2002:

“New Labour’s flagship environmental policy has been its promotion of the Kyoto Protocol. Yet Kyoto is patently inadequate to the task of reducing CO2 emissions globally by 60% by 2050. In essence, Kyoto provides a good framework with absurdly low targets.”

So, was the UN Climate Convention (otherwise known as the Earth Summit or UNCED) really an “environmental milestone” and exemplar of the EU’s commitment to the environment? Well, not really.

As Pratap Chatterjee and Matthias Finger conclude in their 1994 book *The Earth Brokers: Power, Politics and World Development*:

“Rather than developing a new vision in line with the challenges of global ecology, UNCED... rehabilitated technological progress and other cults of efficiency. Rather than coming up with creative views on global governance, UNCED has rehabilitated the development institutions and organizations as legitimate agents to deal with new global challenges. These include the Bretton Woods institutions and the UN, as well as the national governments and the multinational corporations. And, finally, rather than making the various stakeholders collaborate and collectively learn our way out of the global crisis, UNCED has coopted some, divided and destroyed others, and promoted the ones

who had the money to take advantage of this combined public relations and lobbying exercise. (p.173)

Or as Michael Goldman wrote in his edited book *Privatizing Nature: Political Struggles for the Global Commons*(1998):

“If we are to learn anything from the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio... it is that the objective of the Summit’s major power brokers was not to constrain or restructure capitalist economies and practices to help save the rapidly deteriorating ecological commons, but rather to restructure the commons (e.g. privatize, ‘develop,’ ‘make more efficient,’ valorize, ‘get the price right’) to accommodate crisis-ridden capitalisms. The effect has not been to stop destructive practices but to normalize and further institutionalize them.” (p.23)

June 12, 2016

The EU Myth of the Origins of Workers' Rights

The Bakers Union is one of the few fighting unions that is campaigning for a socialist exit from the EU. Here follows a short section from the opening address that was given by the Bakers Union president, Ian Hodson, at their 2016 annual conference:

“Standing together and fighting is so valuable: if we fight together, we will win together. Let’s not be divided and conquered. And sometimes we have to ask what the TUC does, and who it represents, sometimes it seems out of touch with workers and trade union members, and so we have to ask why we have to make payments to it? What function does it perform?”

“Since David Cameron became Prime Minister in 2010 we have seen what’s left of workers’ rights in this country being attacked and torn apart by this government. Yet despite this, and an almost universal call for a general strike, the best the TUC has had to offer is a few marches around London, a few celebrity speakers at rallies, and some catchy slogans that mean and achieve precisely nothing!”

“Workers are being shafted time and again over the last six years with total prejudice, where is the direct action? Even the TUC’s comments around the EU have a tone of surrender to them. They seem to be perpetuating a myth that all workers’ rights originate from Europe, and that only Europe can

protect them. The majority of workers' rights in the UK were won by the UK labour movement, and being in the EU hasn't stopped Cameron and his mafia from attacking the trade unions and working people on a daily basis.

"The role of the trade union is to protect workers' rights. Anyone expecting Angela Merkel or Christine Lagarde to do it will be sorely disappointed. Look at how the French trade unions responded; they didn't organise peaceful marches and roll out snappy soundbites; they don't sit around and wait for the EU to protect them either.

"Look at the recent dispute regarding the French government and their attempts to attack their longstanding trade union laws, the French unions won't hesitate to close the country down if they see fit. The likes of Connelly and Harding, not to mention the Chartists and Tolpuddle Martyrs along with other greats that built our movement would be sobbing at the lily-livered and spineless TUC we have in 2016."

- Ian Hodson - June 12, 2016.

June 13, 2016

Leicester Race Equality Centre EU Debate

On May 26 the Leicester Race Equality Centre (TREC) organised their public debate on the EU with Unison steward Manuel Bueno Del Carpio, representing the group Trade Unionists Against the EU.

The audience was polled before and after the debate, with a number of voters swinging from 'remain' to 'undecided.' Following the debate, members of this audience pointed out to the 'remain' speakers that their contributions sounded 'rehearsed' and they were 'fed up with the lies of establishment politicians.' Here follows Manuel Bueno Del Carpio's speech:

"One of the first things I want to do is distinguish between the word immigration and the 'free movement of labour'. An immigrant is a person who throws themselves, throws their lot, in with the country they move to, and therefore they put their stake in its future in that society. 'Free movement of labour' is the freedom of employers throughout Europe to move labour to undermine conditions, wages, and agreements to the benefit of the employers – an example of that is the Lindsey dispute. Lindsey is a big refinery where they needed to expand and instead of the new contractor using the existing trade union agreement and labour they brought two ships of Italian and Portuguese workers using the Posted Workers Directive.

"The Posted Workers Directive allows employers to take labour from one country to another, and then

they have to pay the minimum wage, and no more than the minimum wage, in the country to which they took them. What then happened is that the official trade union movement was going to accept the new rules, but in fact the workers walked out in an unofficial strike, and they were supported by their communities and many solidarity actions. The result was that the employer did in the end stick to their agreement, reemploy British workers, and what is more none of the Italian or Portuguese workers lost their jobs. Instead, they were reemployed on the conditions won in the agreements that workers at Lindsey had.

“I bring that example because the core issue is democracy. I have faith in British democracy, none of it is perfect but it fulfils the dictums of, for example, what Tony Benn said when he asked the question ‘can I remove them?’ Well, we cannot remove Commissioners, who dictate what will happen.... A democracy has to be one where one’s decisions have consequences that we live to. So, to me democracy is the key reason why we should leave because with democracy we can deal with problems, whether they be trade or whatever. I have faith that as a people we can deal with whatever the future throws at us.

...

“The EU is an institution with a constitution based upon the needs of capitalism and mainly of the large corporations, not of any firms, but of the large corporations. That’s why Obama is all in favour of us stay-

ing in, it's because that's the group that he represents. That's why all sorts of groups like the IMF and the World Bank and other pro-corporate organisations do not want Britain to leave, because they are concerned with keeping their imperialist structures.

“The second reason I want us to leave is because I have faith in the British people, and I hear from the other side quite often, in particularly as a trade unionist, that we are going to lose these rights or we are going to lose that right. Particularly because I was coming to this audience I was thinking of the issue of equality in terms of diversity, racial equality, gender equality and the rest. The concept is that these will either be lost or won because of an external institution. Now that is a profound, a profound misunderstanding of how equality has been achieved in Britain, and what it means. Of course, our Parliament has passed laws that have enshrined certain rights, and of course the EU has passed on laws on ‘social Europe’ and things like that, but the main... thing is that the changes have been won as a result of changes in the people in Britain.

“When I first came to Britain, I lived for a time in Notting Hill Gate and at that time in that place there were a lot of African-Caribbean people there; at that time there was quite open racism. I mean racism and inequality was quite widespread, but it was challenged, and it was challenged by not only those people, but by many more, and it's been the struggles of millions, literally millions of British people of all races and ages and genders, and of thousands of organisations

– I am particularly aware of what happened in the trade unions. Within unions there was continuous debate about how to represent people, how representative committees were, whether there was sufficient diversity, and these were big debates that gradually changed.

“So that the concept that if we leave the EU, that the government would suddenly introduce legislation that is anti-equality or anti-democratic is quite ridiculous because no government would survive that. But more to the point if any government did, the British people would not allow it – there are sections who would, but there would be many more that will oppose them. Fraternity and solidarity with the peoples of Europe does not depend upon the dictats or the permission of a capitalist corporatist institution, but it relies upon our own fraternal relations with them, whether they be in trade, culture, corporations – and it has to be based on mutual benefit.”

June 15, 2016

Samworth Brothers TTIP Love-In

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a multi-billion dollar privatisation treaty between the US and EU that aims to guarantee access to public services for giant corporations to make vast profits.

The national president of the Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU), Ian Hodson, argues that the EU's secretive involvement in the negotiations surrounding this treaty illustrate "just how much the EU has mutated into one huge business cartel". That is but one of many reasons why the Bakers Union are presently campaigning to leave the EU.

Fundamentally, Hodson writes: TTIP "is about reducing certain regulatory barriers for large organisations" – regulatory barriers that exist to protect the rights of normal working class people. He continues:

"One of the main aims of TTIP is to open up Europe's Public Health, Education and Water services to US companies. This would essentially mean the privatisation of our NHS. US companies would also have the power to sue countries who don't toe the line, thus strengthening American's imperialistic grip on other nations." (Bakers Union magazine, Spring 2016)

Unsurprisingly the Tory bosses at Samworth Brothers have a different take on TTIP, and are wetting themselves about its potential to extend their ability to enrich themselves at the expense of their workers and, it seems, everybody else.

In fact, just last June Samworth managers invited corporate lobbyists, BritishAmerican Business, to their Walkers Charnwood Bakery site to co-host a love-in for TTIP. Tory MEP Emma McClarkin, who is the co-ordinator on the EU's International Trade Committee, was just one of the many guests at this prestigious TTIP event. Fittingly, she even boasts on her web site that she "is the leading Conservative figure in Europe on the Transatlantic

Trade and Investment Partnership”. (With no hint of irony, McClarkin is presently campaigning to leave the EU because it’s lack of democracy.)

McClarkin’s high-level of personal commitment to TTIP, however, leads McClarkin to argue that her favoured treaty represents “an opportunity for the NHS, not a threat” – and she even goes so far as accusing one of Britain’s leading trade unions (Unite) of scaremongering about the threats posed by her beloved treaty.

Such dismissive attitudes regarding unions are all too normal in the world of big business, and are unfortunately very reminiscent of the scaremongering tactics currently being employed by Samworth’s own management about the alleged threat posed by trade unions to their ability to freely exploit their workforce. Scaremongering that has led to the systematic bullying of staff and the recent unfounded sacking of a leading member of the Bakers Union, Kumaran Bose.

Profits always trump workers’ rights in the business world, which is why Samworth bosses are so excited about TTIP and so hostile to unions. Nevertheless, trade unions, like the Bakers Union, do provide a ray of hope for the future of thousands of workers who seek to organise themselves collectively to improve their lot in life, vis-à-vis their bargaining power with their bosses.

This is why it is so important for all workers to join a trade union, and for demands to be made upon the Samworth fat-cats to immediately reinstate Kumaran Bose.

June 16, 2016

Lexiteers Masquerading as Racists?

Earlier today Labour MP Jo Cox was murdered. Thousands of people took to social media to express messages of condolence and solidarity.

People across the labour movement are united in their opposition to this senseless murder, and to use such an event as political fodder is contemptible. But here in Leicester, a vitriolic and bitter Labour Party campaigner updated their facebook timeline to defame principled socialists campaigning for a Left Exit from the EU (or Lexit).

The confused hater-in-question wrote the following comment when posting a link to a *Metro* article titled "MP Jo Cox shot outside Birstall library 'by man shouting Britain First'."

"This is what the brexit campaign is legitimating. Outpourings of right wing racist hate. Congratulations to the anti-internationalists who masquerade as fighting for workers and human rights under the name of lexit."

Certainly, bile is too weak a word for such a vacuous attack on socialists campaigning to leave the EU. Yes, EU Brexit campaigning has certainly been consumed by racism, but to then blame socialists for this is to stoop to new lows of sloganeering.

Lexit campaigners have remained steadfast to internationalist socialist principles in fighting for workers' and human

rights. Campaigners like the author in question reveal themselves as unscrupulous and opportunistic in the extreme.

June 19, 2016

Take the EU Test

Xenophobes and racists were always going to vote to Leave the EU; so should you let this affect how you vote on Thursday? If, like many people, you are worried that a vote to Leave will provide a devastating victory to right-wing racists and murderers then a more thorough examination of the track record of each of the main parties may be necessary.

All of the mainstream political parties are tarnished with toxic record of supporting cuts, austerity, and the needs of big business. And each of these parties are now attempting to use fear to guide our vote in the upcoming EU referendum. The official campaigns of UKIP, the Tories, the Lib Dems, and the Labour Party are all guilty of this.

Although in 2015 workers voted overwhelmingly to elect a democratically-minded individual as the leader of the Labour Party, this has tragically not altered the fundamentally right-wing nature of the rest of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Labour remains beholden to the interests of big business.

In fact, it is the entrenched Blairites who are driving support for the Labour Remain campaign.

In lieu of a principled Labour Leave position, the more vibrant and militant socialist-led trade unions, like the Bakers Union, RMT, ASLEF, and the largest public sector union in Northern Ireland, NIPSA, have had to carry the torch of Euroscepticism.

At the other end of the political spectrum, the hard right of the Tories, and their fellow travellers in UKIP, seek to blame

foreigners/immigrants for economic problems caused by the increasing concentration of wealth and property.³

The hard right also use the EU as a scapegoat to generate anti-migrant feeling, so any referendum was always going to have been seized upon eagerly by hard-right Brexiteers. But does that then mean that the 99% must always vote in opposition to such forces of reaction? Of course not. Just because Labour, the official opposition party to the uber-racist Tories, happen to be backing the Remain camp, doesn't mean working class voters must feel obligated to vote Remain.

The deluge of misinformation on immigration is particularly virulent and problematic because, in recent decades, the Labour Party has done little to counter the racist lies spouting forth from the mainstream media, the Tories and UKIP. After all it was not so long ago that Labour created their own "controls on immigration" mug, and electoral broadcast that reinforced popular fears about immigration without pointing toward any socialist solutions to the urgent problems facing the 99%.

³ The roots of the UK Independence Party's and the former Referendum Party's manifestation of eurosceptic post-imperial populism are most usefully traced back to Margaret Thatcher's 1988 Bruges speech, which led to the formation of the Bruges Group under the leadership of University of Oxford undergraduate student Patrick Robertson. With financial backing provided courtesy of Sir James Goldsmith, prominent members of the Bruges Group included Alan Sked (who went on to found UKIP in September 1993) and their founding chairman, Lord Harris of High Cross (who was the former head of the Institute of Economic Affairs, 1957-1987; and board member of Rupert Murdoch's Times Newspapers Holdings Ltd from 1988 until 2001). For further background, see "UKIP – yet another establishment party," *The Socialist*, May 27, 2009.

Labour supporters may now be wringing their hands over the racist nature of the official Leave campaign, but the Parliamentary Labour Party has been instrumental in steering the debate in this direction. Moreover, Labour's continued support for cuts and austerity has created a political vacuum on the left, which, unfortunately, we are now seeing filled out.

A successful British Exit from the EU was always going to embolden far-rightwing forces within society, so it is a wonder why so many on the left have been taken by surprise. The fear of fascists marching unopposed across the country is insulting to the working class who have and continue to play a leading role in fighting racism. What is needed is to build a clear socialist alternative to the austerity of the EU and of the mainstream political parties.

There are many good non-racist reasons for voting to Leave the EU, which is, without a doubt, an anti-democratic Employers' Union that enforces the hopeless politics of austerity across Europe. It is after all the politics of austerity — that are so central to the EU project — that provides the fuel for racists and the far-right to grow in the first place. So, vote Leave on the 23rd and fight for a socialist, democratic future for Britain, for Europe, and for the entire world.

June 20, 2016

“The EU is Not Worker – or People-Friendly.”

In the Summer 2016 edition of *Foodworker* magazine, Ian Hodson, the President of the Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) explained:

“Whilst we, as a union recognise that people may have differing views on the ‘in’ or ‘out’ campaigns, I think it’s worth mentioning that membership of the EU has not prevented any of the government’s relentless anti-Trade Union attacks since 2010 and when you look at the issues the TUC [Trade Union Congress] are raising by way of making the claim to stay in the EU, to say they are being disingenuous, would be an understatement.

“For instance, they seem to be suggesting that the EU is responsible for the few rights that Trade Unions have left. It wasn’t EU legislation that gave us the Equality Act; – it was the women of Dagenham who went on strike before we joined. The Health and Safety at Work Act of 1974, which is still the spine of virtually all UK safety legislation didn’t come from the EU either.

“Also, the suggestion that the minimum wage somehow came from the EU and would be put at risk by ‘Brexit’ is also incorrect. It was the Trade Union Movement in the UK that campaigned for it, and it was the then Labour government of the UK that introduced it. To see former TUC General Secretary, Brendan Barber sharing a pro-EU platform with David Cameron is just plain wrong on so many levels, particularly as it came

on the day after the implementation of more draconian legislation to restrict workers.

“The BFAWJ’s position on the EU is driven by its inherent lack of democracy and the appointment of unaccountable and unelected Commissioners who make the big decisions, as opposed to elected MEPs who could and should be held to account in elections. The EU is not worker – or people-friendly. It operates via the cosy relationship between the Commission and big business. You only need to look at Greece in order to realise who the EU really works for.”

June 22, 2016

Remaining Green, and Other Worries about Tory EU Funders

There are many good reasons for voting to Leave the EU, which is why I will be doing so in the morning.

Others on the Left can, in principle, agree on the multitude of arguments that exist for backing a vote to Leave, but say that we shouldn't do it now because right-wing Tories have hijacked the debate. This worry has led to some individuals on the Left, who are voting Remain, to become consumed by the misinformed idea that if we leave the EU the only people who will benefit will be the rightwingers. Not so.

Either way, in an effort to win over people like myself, this has led despairing-Remainers to conflate principled socialist campaigns with the unprincipled scaremongering official campaigns being waged by everybody else (be they Remain or Leave).

On top of all this, the mainstream media has played an appalling role during this entire debate (nothing new or unexpected there) in refusing to give media time to the socialist case for Leaving the EU. Although, to be fair, my local newspaper, the *Leicester Mercury*, did publish my first-person article on this matter earlier today (see below), making it the first socialist argument for Leaving that they had published.

So, earlier this evening, when I re-posted this rare first-person article on Facebook, some people on the Left took offence. One such person was an influential local member of the Green Party, who commented below my post:

“So, I just found out that a Tory [Robin Birley] who helped fund Pinochet and RENAMO has been funding a ‘left’ exit campaign (‘Green Leaves’). Does that worry you?”

This statement did not particularly worry me, as the Socialist Party (to which I belong) and TUSC, with whom I campaign, take a principled approach to campaigning and refuse to accept funding from Tories and fat cat elites — and subsequently refused to campaign alongside the official right-wing Leave campaign.

Of course, it is entirely reasonable that this Green Party activist was worried about the funding of a small left-leaning group within his own Party, but, if his funding concern proved true, it is hardly surprising. I say this because the official Remain campaign of the Green Party is openly collaborating with David Cameron and company, and Caroline Lucas (the Green’s only MP) signed-up to a leaflet (“10 Green Reasons for Remaining in Europe”) that supported the EU’s Emissions Trading Scheme — a farcical scheme that is usually totally opposed by the Green Party.

First-Person article published in the Leicester Mercury

Making the Leftist Case for Brexit

Xenophobes and racists were always going to vote to Leave the EU; so should you let this affect how you vote on Thursday?

If, like many people, you are worried that a vote to Leave will provide a victory to racists and murderers then a more thoroughgoing examination of the track record of each of the main parties may be necessary.

All of the mainstream political parties are tarnished with a toxic record of supporting cuts, austerity, and the needs of big business. And each of these parties are now attempting to use fear to guide our vote in the upcoming EU referendum. The official campaigns of UKIP, the Tories, the Lib Dems, and the Labour Party are all guilty of this.

Although in 2015 workers voted overwhelmingly to elect a democratically-minded individual as the leader of the Labour Party, this has tragically not altered the fundamentally right-wing nature of the rest of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Labour remains beholden to the interests of big business.

In fact, it is the entrenched Blairites who are driving support for the Labour Remain campaign.

In lieu of a principled Labour Leave position, the more vibrant and militant socialist-led trade unions, like the Bakers Union, RMT, ASLEF, and the largest public sector union in Northern Ireland, NIPSA, have had to carry the torch of Euroscepticism.

The deluge of misinformation on immigration is particularly virulent and problematic because, in recent decades, the Labour Party has done little to counter the racist lies spouting forth from the mainstream media, the Tories and UKIP.

Labour supporters may now be wringing their hands over the racist nature of the official Leave campaign, but the Parliamentary Labour Party has been instrumental in steering the debate in this direction. Moreover, Labour's continued support for cuts and austerity has created a political vacuum on the left, which, unfortunately, we are now seeing filled out by the right.

What is needed is to build a clear socialist alternative to the austerity of the EU and of the mainstream political parties.

There are many good non-racist reasons for voting to Leave the EU, which is, without a doubt, an anti-democratic Employers' Union that enforces the hopeless politics of austerity across Europe. It is after all the politics of austerity — that are so central to the EU project — that provides the fuel for racists and the far-right to grow in the first place.

So vote Leave on the 23rd and fight for a socialist, democratic future for Britain, for Europe, and for the entire world.

June 24, 2016

From Samworth to Spain: Taking Action for Workers' Rights

Sunday will be an important day for two reasons. Firstly, it will play host to an important local protest in defence of workers' rights that will be taking place outside the headquarters of Melton-based Samworth Brothers. This protest is part of a growing campaign to demand the reinstatement of sacked union rep Kumaran Bose.

Secondly, although you may not have heard much about it there will be a general election in Spain, in which anti-austerity socialists have a good chance of seizing power. As the British Tory press frets:

"The Spanish prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, has warned against a possible shock victory by Podemos in Sunday's general election as the hard Left, anti-austerity party surges to just three points behind the ruling Popular Party (PP) in opinion polls." (June 21, *Daily Telegraph*)

The Economist magazine notes:

"Podemos... has tapped the frustration of the young. Mr [Pablo] Iglesias [the leader of Podemos] has re-defined Spanish politics as a struggle against la *casta* ('the caste'), by which he means the leaders

and hangers-on of the traditional parties who colonised institutions from the courts to the savings banks and the boardrooms of corporate Spain.”

The likelihood of a success for socialists in Spain has been improved by the recent decision of Podemos to unite in an electoral alliance with Izquierda Unida — which won a million votes in last December’s elections — to stand united as Unidos Podemos (“Together we can”).

Here it should be noted that although the leadership of Podemos ended up backing Syriza’s betrayal of the heroic “OXI” of the Greek working class in last summer’s austerity referendum, now Britain has voted to leave the EU there is a possibility that Unidos Podemos may be emboldened to break with the anti-democratic strictures of the EU.

The possibility of a serious challenge to the EU has been increased by the left-wing leadership shown by Alberto Garzon, who, since last year has been the leader of Izquierda Unida. Earlier this month, for example, a political motion put to the Izquierda Unida assembly by Garzon which won over 70% support clearly stated that the “EU is un-reformable and incompatible with the sovereignty of peoples or with any policy of social transformation”.

So, let’s build for the local protest on Sunday to defend workers’ rights, and be hopeful that we can celebrate a critical victory for socialism in Spain on Sunday too.

June 25, 2016

Labour MP Predicts a General Election this Year

Now Britain has voted to leave the EU, we now need to have a vote to say good riddance to the Tories. For that to happen we need to bring pressure to bear upon the government to force a General Election.

This is not some pie-in-the-sky demand, because as reported in the *Leicester Mercury* today, distraught Remain campaigner, Labour MP Jon Ashworth, “said he could foresee a General Election within the next five months in the aftermath of the Brexit vote.” The sooner the better is all I can say.

Another local Labour MP, Keith Vaz, who harks from the opposite end of the political spectrum from his Party’s leader, however felt personally crushed by the referendum result. Mr Vaz used his space in the local newspaper to insult the public by saying “they voted emotionally rather than looking at the facts” (June 25, *Mercury*). For good measure he added: “They [voters] rejected the advice of all the experts, they rejected the arguments that had been put forward by almost everyone in Parliament.”

With voters having been lied to by all manner of politicians, from UKIP to Labour, it should come as little surprise that they don’t trust the experts, who themselves often work as mouthpieces for the parliamentary/corporate establishment.

It is particularly ironic that Mr Vaz is so affronted by this working class insult to the powerful, as he himself has spent the last quarter of a century ignoring both expert and public advice by voting to support every war under the sun. He says that Brexit will

have “catastrophic” consequences for the world, but what has really been catastrophic for the world is his persistent support for war.

Others thankfully have a more positive vision for the future, and so yesterday, Matt Wrack, general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union explained: “The resignation of David Cameron will not be mourned by firefighters or other workers – indeed it would be better if the entire government resigned.”

Unfortunately, such a mass resignation is not likely, hence the need to popularise the demand for a General Election, now!

In the meantime, Matt Wrack made clear:

“Any attempt to introduce an emergency budget that further attacks public services or seeks to increase taxes on working people, must be opposed by the trade union movement and the Labour Party.

“Trade unions must campaign on the basis of unity. We have to ensure that any debate around immigration does not scapegoat migrant workers, which includes thousands of people who deliver our NHS and work in our fire and rescue service. Where others want division, we must answer with unity and solidarity.

“To workers across the UK we say, whether you voted Leave or Remain, we must stand together in defence of jobs, our rights and public services.”

And as Hannah Sell, the Deputy General Secretary of the Socialist Party points out in a recent interview:

“We share with working class people in Britain who voted for Leave, and also millions of working class people across Europe, who suffered at the hands of the EU, a sense of elation that we succeeded in striking a blow against the establishment. But we also understand that there were working class people who voted for remain, and that they woke up worried about the consequences of the exit vote; worried that yet again it would be working class people expected to pay the price; and also worried about the increase of racism, of nationalism, of anti-migrant feeling after the referendum.

“But there is nothing automatic about the Right being the winners from this Brexit vote. Millions of people, as Jeremy Corbyn rightly said, voted against austerity when they voted on the 23rd of June. We now need to harness that movement. Corbyn should be demanding a General Election and saying that he would stand on a clear anti-austerity program.”

June 21, 2017

The Return of Labour's Brexit Moaners

Hundreds of thousands of ordinary members of the Labour Party and increasing numbers of the wider public stand firmly united behind Jeremy Corbyn's popular socialist program for change. His anti-austerity vision for Britain stands in stark contrast to the pro-austerity politics of hopelessness that was previously promoted by too many "New Labour" MPs for too long.

Now a new group of fifty Labour politicians, including many individuals whose allegiances are still to a dead New Labour, has written to Corbyn and the national media to inform them that they have some disagreements over Brexit negotiations. (Open Letter, "As Labour politicians, we reject a hard-right Brexit, and defend the single market," *The Guardian*, June 20.)

Ironically this motley crew of Brexit-obsessives suggests that the only way that Corbyn can truly satisfy all the people who voted Labour would be by "fighting unambiguously for membership of the single market." This of course is rubbish as not only is the single market not progressive (contrary to much very misleading New Labour propaganda), but it ignores the popularity of Corbyn's fresh approach to campaigning against further public service cuts and austerity. The fifty moaners thus write:

"To win next time, Labour must provide a strong opposition to the Tories, stand up for the values of our voters, and continue to fight for the interests of all – not least young people who have the most to lose

from an extreme Tory Brexit and who voted for the first time in 2017 for Labour, thinking we would stop the Tories in their tracks.”

But it is hard to take this letter too seriously, as leading signatories of the open letter include Chuka Umunna and Liz Kendall, individuals who absolutely failed to “provide a strong opposition to the Tories” and their anti-working class program of austerity. With or without their support, Corbyn however will “continue to fight for the interests of all” and this is why he doesn’t need to be reminded to do so by individuals who have no proven ability to fight for working-class interests (in anything other than rhetoric). They end their divisive letter by observing:

“An ambitious and confident alternative government – with Corbyn at the helm – should not throw in the towel as May has done, but could seek membership with reforms on immigration and the other matters we seek.”

Corbyn however has never thrown in the towel, but the letter promoted by this group of fifty shit-stirrers has already served to weaken Labour by promoting the entirely predictable headline the Tory press: “LABOUR’S CIVIL WAR: Dozens of MPs defy Corbyn on Brexit – & he thinks he can take control” (*Daily Express*, June 21). Their letter is hardly likely to help ensure that the Tories are kicked out soon, and that a Corbyn-led government comes to power later this year!

Corbyn has fought for workers' rights his entire life, which explains why he spent most of his life opposing the anti-democratic, anti-worker dictates of the European Union.

Yes, now is the time to press Corbyn to ensure he exerts maximum influence upon any negotiations to "keep workers safe," but this best way of doing this is by bringing an end to the wobbly Tories. I wonder what role these fifty odd Labour dissenters will play in building for the million-person march against the Tories that will be taking place in London on 1st July?

Note: Signatories of the open letter include: Chuka Umunna MP, Phil Wilson MP, Madeleine Moon MP, Maria Eagle MP, Liz Kendall MP, Stella Creasy MP, Wes Streeting MP, Mike Gapes MP, Kate Green MP, Lord Michael Cashman, Anne Coffey MP, Ian Murray MP, Rushanara Ali MP, Karen Buck MP, Stephen Doughty MP, Stephen Timms MP, Lord Spencer Livermore, Catherine McKinnell MP, Lord Peter Hain, Tulip Siddiq MP, Peter Kyle MP, Ruth Cadbury MP, Bridget Philipson MP, Pat McFadden MP, Ann Clwyd MP, Thangam Debbonaire MP, Chris Bryant MP, Andy Slaughter MP, Daniel Zeichner MP, Alison McGovern MP, Darren Jones MP, Kerry McCarthy MP, Ben Bradshaw MP, Clare Moody MEP, Seb Dance MEP, Luciana Berger MP, Lord George Foulkes, Catherine Stihler MEP, David Martin MEP, Jude Kirton-Darling MEP, Mary Honeyball MEP, Paul Branzen MEP, Richard Corbett MEP, Julie Ward MEP, Derek Vaughan MEP, Lucy Anderson MEP, David Lammy MP, Lord John Monks, Meg Hillier MP, Adrian Bailey MP and Lady Meta Ramsay

October 30, 2017

Leicester's Labour Leaders Still Opposing Corbyn

Labour has a dedicated socialist as their leader, a man whose activist-orientation towards fighting for the working-class is backed up by overwhelming majority of the Labour Party's membership. Yet the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party still oppose Jeremy Corbyn's leftist leadership; with the same holding true of Labour's representatives within the European Parliament.

Leicester's very own Rory 'Tory' Palmer officially began working in the European Parliament this month having replaced the former MEP for the East Midlands, Glenis Willmott. Like Willmott his Blairite predecessor, last year Palmer actively campaigned in the media for Corbyn's resignation as Labour's leader.

One of the Palmer's first votes in Europe was to ensure that fellow Corbyn opponent, Richard Corbett succeeded Willmott as the new right-leaning leader of Labour's MEP's. Corbett, like Willmott, had backed Owen Smith in last years failed leadership coup.

But even Labour leaders who ostensibly support Corbyn, like local Leicester South MP Jon Ashworth, continue to undermine genuine socialist policies. Thus, in his position as Shadow Health Secretary, Mr Ashworth refuses to commit to kicking all the corporate profiteers out of our health service by supporting calls for the full renationalisation of the NHS.

By contrast, members of Mr Ashworth's Constituency Labour Party (CLP) are more clued up as to how to win electoral support for Labour. Thus just prior to the Labour Party Conference, against his wishes, his Constituency members passed a motion proposed by the Socialist Health Association which, amongst other things, called for Labour to reaffirm "its manifesto commitment to restore our NHS by reversing its privatisation and halting Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships."

This motion with minor amendments was passed unanimously at the subsequent Labour Party Conference. Islington CLP member Sue Richards who is also an executive member of Keep Our NHS Public seconded the successful motion at the Labour Conference, but in making her speech correctly criticised Mr Ashworth's earlier pleasant-sounding speech in defence of the NHS saying:

"I want to be quite tough on Jon Ashworth which actually is hard because he gave such a good speech, and I liked it a lot and I really, really listened carefully to what he said and didn't say.... We need to move back from Thatcher's model of the NHS to Aneurin Bevin's model of the NHS, which is a properly planned, coherent, publicly accountable system for the NHS, which removes the internal market as well as the external market; and I have to say I don't think I heard Jon say that. Last year Conference you passed a motion for the NHS Reinstatement Bill which was to include that element, but we have had to put another motion this year, and it would break my heart to have to come

back again, so Jon Ashworth don't be breaking my heart."

Hence the battle for the future of Labour remains, and every minute that passes without the adoption of true democratic accountability of Labour representatives at local levels, the less likely that a Labour government, which will likely come to power within the next year, will contain enough Labour MPs and MEPs who will be willing to implement Corbyn's massively popular program for socialist change.

December 17, 2017

Amnesty International's Report on Libya: the EU vs. Refugees

Last week, in the wake of global outrage over the sale of migrants in Libya, Amnesty International released a devastating report which showed how European governments are knowingly complicit in the torture and abuse of tens of thousands of refugees and migrants detained by Libyan immigration authorities.

Libya's dark web of collusion details how EU member states – particularly Italy – are actively supporting a sophisticated system of abuse and exploitation of refugees and migrants in order to prevent people from crossing the Mediterranean. Amnesty International's Europe Director, John Dalhuisen said:

“European governments have not just been fully aware of these abuses; by actively supporting the Libyan authorities in stopping sea crossings and containing people in Libya, they are complicit in these abuses.”

The shocking Amnesty report therefore concluded:

“In relation to Libya, EU governments must realize the horrific consequences of their policies of containment, recognize their unlawful nature, and reset their co-operation with Libya. This must focus first and foremost on protecting human rights, and in particular those of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers trapped in Libya. Preventing deaths in the Mediterranean must remain a priority, but this should not and does not need to come at the expense of the rights of the people fleeing Libya. A very different approach to the one adopted currently, which appears almost exclusively driven by the desire to reduce departures from Libya, is required.”

This refugee problem is not a one-off issue for the member states of the anti-democratic, anti-working-class European Union. For example, only last year former Irish member of the European Parliament (2011-2014) and now Solidarity-People Before Profit TD, Paul Murphy, attacked the EU for supporting “an agreement to turn Turkey and, apparently, a supposedly safe area of Syria into a prison camp for those fleeing war in the Middle East.”

The EU as an institution is an enemy of a united global working-class: it was since its inception, and it still is now. Even liberal commentators at the *Guardian* grasp the threat that the EU poses to struggles for democracy and human rights. Thus, writing last week the *Guardian's* economics editor Larry Elliot pointed out how:

“Labour’s current contortions over Brexit are evidence of the tension between these two worldviews. A chunk of the [parliamentary] party – the bigger chunk – thinks the only way to counter the excesses of capitalism is at a supra-national EU level. Yet it is hard to square this belief with the 2007 Lisbon treaty, which commits member states to act in accordance with the principle of an open economy with free competition; frowns on state aid; and lays out disciplinary procedures for governments that run excessive deficits.”

Progressive trade unionists and socialists like Jeremy Corbyn have always fought for democracy by opposing the EU on a class basis. Corbyn’s democratic class impulses must therefore no longer be silenced by the anti-working-class Blairites who still dominate the parliamentary leadership of the Labour Party.⁴ Labour should be proud that the people of Britain voted to leave the EU, but they must now forcefully make the case for a progressive

⁴ Later in the month Liz Kendall defied Corbyn (and the democratic results of the EU referendum) by joining 62 other Blairite rebels in casting her vote in Parliament to try to keep the UK in the single market and customs union after Brexit.

anti-racist Brexit so we can enter into a genuinely progressive relationship with all European countries on our own terms; rather than blathering on about the so-called benefits of the single-market Labour must now be at the forefront of organising the fight for a socialist Britain, a socialist Europe, and a socialist World!

February 26, 2018

What Corbyn Must Learn From his Brexit Speech

“The cliff edge draws nearer,” says Chuka Umunna, as he put pen to paper to write another piece of fake Blairite news for *The Independent* today. Surely his career in the Labour Party must now be drawing close. Umunna led off his article with following outright deception:

“The Brexit train rolls on this week with a major and welcome announcement by Jeremy Corbyn committing the Labour Party to the UK’s permanent participation in the European Union’s customs union.”

Evidently Mr Umunna wasn’t listening. What Corbyn actually said during his Brexit speech was that: “During the transition period, Labour would seek to remain in a customs union with the EU and

within the single market.” To repeat: “During the transition period”.

This does not mean that a Corbyn-led Labour Party will fight to remain in the EU customs union after Brexit. “Britain will need a bespoke, negotiated relationship of its own,” Corbyn stated. He does not want the old customs union with all its attendant democratic problems for workers, but instead, he made clear: “Labour would seek to negotiate a new comprehensive UK-EU customs union...”

“A new customs arrangement would depend on Britain being able to negotiate agreement of new trade deals in our national interest,” Corbyn added. “We would ensure there will be no reduction in [workers] rights, standards or protections and instead seek to extend them.”

Corbyn talked of his opposition to the “free market orthodoxy” of the EU, and the need for Labour to not be held back from taking the steps to “stop the tide of privatisation and outsourcing or from preventing employers being able to import cheap agency labour to undercut existing pay and conditions.” On this he explained:

“So we would also seek to negotiate protections, clarifications or exemptions where necessary in relation to privatisation and public service competition directives state aid and procurement rules and the posted workers directive.”

This is good news. There will be no second referendum, Labour are leaving the EU, and they are determined to fight for workers' rights. That much we knew already.

We should however be critical of Corbyn's latest speech, as clearly he wasn't forthright enough in clarifying what form of deal a socialist government would aim to negotiate for British workers in leaving the EU. Once again he left himself wide open to misinterpretation because his speech sought to mollify his Blairite critics who, of course, still dominate the leadership of the Labour Party.

But what Corbyn should have done is make clear his differences with the Blairites within, and make it obvious to the rest of the world that Umunna's dream of a "permanent participation in the European Union's customs union" would be an utter disaster for Britain.

Clarity is everything for class politics. Corbyn must now go on the offensive against those who seek to misrepresent all socialist ideas. To do anything less is to allow the Blairite enemies of the working-class to destroy the potential for the Labour Party to act as a powerful vehicle for fighting for the 99%.

March 2, 2018

The EU is Not Saving Italians From Fascism

Last week *The Guardian* ran a guest article authored by neoliberal human rights activist, Sabrina Gasparrini, about the forthcoming Italian elections which was titled “Berlusconi’s comeback shows that Italy still struggles with its fascist past” (February 21, 2018). Like many *Guardian* articles, this article’s content is utterly derisive of working-class struggle. But the author at least raises one gem which helps to explain why ordinary voters are fed up with mainstream politics. “Fatigue, if not exasperation” with politics she points out, reached a “tipping point” in 1991 when:

“In one of the last contemporary displays of massive political enthusiasm, the country held a referendum in which voters were asked whether they wanted to bury the proportional system in Senate elections. More than 95% said yes to that change, in favour of a majority system.

“What happened next is seared in my memory as my first big political disappointment. A law was passed that did not respect the choice voters had made. Instead, it introduced a hybrid electoral mechanism that did nothing to solve the problem of political instability. Humiliation was inflicted on popular sovereignty.”

Then, instead of drawing attention to inspiring working-class formations like Potere al Popolo (Power to the People) – a party

which is attempting to fight for the type of socialist ideas that have been vanquished from traditional politics — Gasparrini merely frets about the rising tide of fascism.

She is correct however when she writes: “Without a genuine political project in which citizens are made to be actors, not tired spectators, we won’t pull out of this mess.” But the type of political project she is thinking of is a hope that “one day a United States of Europe will emerge.”

In a truly gruesome turn, Gasparrini somehow manages to belittle both democracy and the democratic instincts of the Italian working-class when she says that the only thing that “prevent[s] Italy from further sliding into populism and from eroding democratic principles” is the European Union!?! Thus, she bizarrely believes that Italy’s membership of the EU “acts as a bulwark against our worst instincts.”

In her mind if it wasn’t for the undemocratic EU then Italy would have already have succumbed to fascism! Her solution then is to argue the need for Italians to put their faith in the type of distant, undemocratic, and elitist institutions that large proportions of the working-class quite rightly already correctly despise.

July 5, 2018

Building for a Socialist Brexit, and the Dangers of “Left Against Brexit”

In recent years the Tories have been carrying through a veritable bonfire of workers' rights, environmental protections and human rights. This is really nothing new, and few on the left would disagree that the Tories have plans to ignite further bonfires in the near future. The matter of what to do with regards the results of the EU referendum results is however far more divisive.

But to begin with, let's be absolutely clear: when the public voted to leave the EU, they understood that they were voting with a Tory government at the helm of our country. Likewise, for many good reasons, the working-class understand that the one thing they can trust most politicians to do is to lie (hence the dwindling participation of working-class people in parliamentary elections).

For these reasons, the so-called anti-Brexit campaign group, Another Europe is Possible, and their forthcoming “The Left Against Brexit” speaking tour, is moving in the totally wrong direction when they say that “Britain can stay and lead in the EU”.

The campaign is of course obliged to mouth respect for democracy when they say: “We respect the result of the referendum,” but they then undo this when they add that a “vital part of any democracy that people are allowed to change their minds.” They aim to allow this change of mind to happen by promoting another referendum, this time on the final terms of any Brexit-deal. This is a tactic that can only serve to alienate even more working-

class people from electoral politics and from the left more generally.

The irony embodied within such dangerous “democratic” arguments is illustrated by the fact that their campaign includes amongst its current leadership, Dr Marina Prentoulis, a spokesperson for Syriza, who should know better than to ignore the popular mandate of the people. In a recent academic article titled “Left Populism: the challenges from grassroots to electoral politics” (2017), she writes:

“In terms of Greece, the [2008 financial] crisis revealed the structural inequalities inscribed in the Eurozone project, which enabled the financial sector to survive unscattered, while the people of Southern Europe and, especially, Greece still suffer the results of extreme austerity, unsustainable debt and impoverishment.”

The attacks of the Eurozone Troika (the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission), which pushed “unprecedented austerity” (her words) upon the Greek people as part of the Eurozone bailout agreement (the so-called memorandum) are critical to understanding what is happening in Greece. Dr Prentoulis explains how Syriza “became the primary voice of opposition towards the old elites and the austerity imposed by the Troika” with “the establishment” being those “defined as those who signed the memorandum.”

Syriza of course had their own referendum in July 2015 when the Greek public voted overwhelmingly to reject the Troika’s austerity memorandum. Tragically, the leadership of

Syriza chose to capitulate to the anti-democratic mandates of the Troika and betrayed the Greek working-class by failing to carry through the will of the people. Dr Prentoulis skates over this disastrous action, and after explaining that Syriza had initially opposed the Eurozone establishment commented: "(Of course, later that changed when the SYRIZA-led government was forced to accept the memorandum.)" But Syriza was never "forced" to ignore the massive mandate they received from the public. It was a political choice, and the wrong-one at that. And it was precisely this choice that has allowed the far-right to grow in strength because of Syriza's open and unnecessary betrayal of the working-class.

There are many lessons from the Greek experience of the EU. The first is that the Corbyn-led Labour Party must oversee Britain's exit from the EU. What we now need is a socialist Brexit, a complete break with the anti-democratic institutions of the EU. And to do this the utmost priority should be given to getting rid of our weak and divided Tory government.

The Tory government could be brought down this year, and so the very worst thing that Labour supporters should be doing now is trying to lead a campaign that for all intents and purposes aims to overturn the results of the Brexit referendum. Their energy would be far better spent in bringing about a general election, not another referendum.

There is no point in dwelling upon the obvious and predictable fact that both the mainstream media and political establishment promoted a racist narrative during debate in the run-up to the EU referendum. And certainly, the official Remain campaign was just as at fault as the Leave campaign for misinforming the public about what the EU really stood for.

On this point Dr Prentoulis acknowledges how “during the referendum campaign, the Remain side emphasized the economic consequences of a leave result, but, more often than not, by advocating the same neoliberal principles that had alienated big parts of the population.” Of course, at the same time, socialists attempted to put across the reasons why a Leave vote should be the official position of a socialist Labour Party (a message that was drowned out). But despite the left-wing leadership of Corbyn (and his hundreds-of-thousands of supporters), the right-wing majority of the members of the Parliamentary Labour Party tragically won the day and helped lead a pro-establishment Remain campaign.

Thankfully, Jeremy Corbyn, who is fully aware that the EU is no friend of the working-class, has stated that he will honour the results of the EU referendum and does not support the undemocratic calls being made by Dr Prentoulis and her friends at Another Europe is Possible. Dr Prentoulis points this out when, in frustration, she observes: “The Labour leadership, in order to avoid being branded as ‘the enemy of the people’ (those who will go against the will of the referendum), decided to vote in favour of triggering article 50.” She then added: “Although Labour still insists they will fight against the Conservative Brexit, it has not re-defined Brexit. It just promises to oppose its more destructive terms at some future moment.”

The Socialist Party (of which I am a member) has always said that Corbyn should have ignored the Blairite threats from within the Parliamentary Labour Party in the run-up to the referendum (and afterwards), so he could reach out to the British population with a clearly articulated working-class message for why

Britain is better off leaving the EU. That he did not do this was a tragedy, but one that can still be remedied. So, now Corbyn must take up the challenge that has been laid down by Dr Prentoulis, and in doing so redefine Brexit along socialist lines, laying out all the reasons why the EU is so destructive of working-class interests, and why a Labour government is willing and able to deliver a socialist Brexit.

July 6, 2018

Remainers Associate Brexit with the Right, yet People's Vote is Supported by Blairites – the very cause of the growth of the far right

Right-wing Labour MPs will stop at nothing in their efforts to undermine democracy. In earlier years, under New Labour's rule, such activities were readily apparent when Blairite MPs openly attacked the working-class at the behest of big business. Labour's Blairite enemies-within are not currently jumping ship because they understand that their personal electoral success is entirely dependent upon their donning Labour's red rosette to disguise their own pro-establishment politics.

The key front in the Blairites ongoing attacks upon Corbyn is the issue of the European Union. Earlier this morning for instance, arch-Blairite Alastair Campbell spoke on *Good Morning Britain* where he established that he was Editor-at-Large for *The New European*, and that he was "campaigning for the People's

Vote on the final [Brexit] deal”. This is the man who is so concerned about democracy that he serves alongside Tories like on the advisory board of Portland Communication, a PR company that happily sells its wares to dictatorial regimes.

Dialling back to the start of the year, in February, well-known Corbyn-hater, Chuka Umunna, became the chairman of a new umbrella group that oversees the activities of nine organisations, collectively known as the Grassroots Coordinating Group. The groups involved being the all-party Parliamentary Group on EU Relations; Open Britain; Best for Britain; the European Movement UK; InFacts; Scientists for EU; Healthier INthe EU; Britain for Europe; and *The New European* newspaper. Since then Umunna has further stepped-up his efforts to undermine Corbyn on the issue of the EU by leading the calls for a second referendum on the final terms of the deal.

Most notably, in June Umunna, along with Liz Kendall and Owen Smith, was among the 75 Labour MPs who “staged a mass revolt against Jeremy Corbyn” by voting to support Britain staying in the European Economic Area (EEA) – the so-called ‘Norway model’. As the Socialist Party put it at the time:

“The 75 MPs backing the ‘Norway Model’ – which would mean signing up to a package of neoliberal rules and regulations in return for access to the European Economic Area – were placing their loyalty to the interests of the capitalist class first and foremost. The love-in between the Blairite right and pro-remain elements on the Conservative benches has demonstrated that the label ‘red Tories’ is no exaggeration.” (*The Socialist*, June 20, 2018)

Enjoying Umunna's unrelenting support, the aforementioned group known as Open Britain, which works closely with the People's Vote campaign, is playing a particularly pernicious role in British politics at this current moment (together they helped organise the anti-Brexit demonstration of tens of thousands of people in London on June 23). The chairman of Open Britain happens to be another powerful Blairite PR impresario and former SDP leading light, Roland Rudd (the brother of Tory MP Amber Rudd). Another important board member of this group is Lord Peter Mandelson, who is godfather to one of Rudd's children. As a former board member one of Russia's largest publicly listed holding company's, Lord Mandelson is the type of internationally-minded capitalist with whom the EU is considered sacrosanct to protecting the profits of big business. This is why Open Britain make no bones about putting the needs of business before people, noting that they are campaigning for Britain to be "open for business, open to trade and investment, open to talent and hard work, open to Europe and to the world."

Finally, one other important elite group that is attempting to overturn the results of the EU referendum is the aforementioned group, Best for Britain, which is funded by George Soros and chaired by another Blairite propaganda agent, Lord Mark Malloch Brown, who is presently a board member of Kerogen Capital – "an independent private equity fund manager specialising in the international oil and gas sector." Brown has a colourful career, to say the least, and while working with the Sawyer-Miller PR Group during the late eighties and early nineties, one of the key

tasks that Brown undertook was to work “extensively on privatisation and other economic reform issues with leaders in Eastern Europe and Russia.” A good example of Brown’s antipathy to democratic process became evident during his role in Bolivia’s 1989 elections, where he acted as the campaign advisor for presidential candidate Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada. Here he helped conduct what one critic referred to as “a bitter negative campaign that mimicked the worst of U.S. presidential campaigns”. Reflecting on Brown’s Bolivian escapades in an essay published in 2007, Perry Anderson explained that Brown’s...

“...main claim to fame was to have been campaign manager for Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, a Bolivian ruler so hated by the population for his neoliberal zeal and subservience to Washington that he had recently had to flee the presidential palace by helicopter, and make for Miami.”

It is for these reasons and many more that the Socialist Party...

“...has been consistent in calling for a class-based, socialist approach to the EU. For us, the question is not ‘hard or soft Brexit’, but Brexit in whose class interests? We call for Corbyn to adopt a socialist, internationalist approach to the negotiations, which has as its ‘red lines’: tearing up the EU bosses’ club rules and demanding workers’ rights; an end to all neoliberal regulations that demand austerity and privatisation; removing the barriers to policies such as nationalisation; stopping the ‘race to the

bottom' in wages and conditions created by the posted workers' directive and other rules; guaranteed rights for all EU workers living in the UK; and an anti-racist, pro-refugee rights position.

"If Corbyn were to adopt such a stand and articulate it clearly and directly, not allowing the likes of Kier Starmer to confuse, dilute and subvert the message, then, along with clear socialist policies, it could lay the basis for winning mass support among working class people." (*The Socialist*, June 20, 2018)

July 9, 2018

Paul Mason's Love-in With the EU

Commenting on Labour Party strategy from the hallowed pages of the *New Statesman* (July 9), Paul Mason is wrong yet again. The only thing he seems able to get correct is to predict the imminent demise of the Tories when he states that "May will likely be overthrown before the Tory conference in October" and that there "will be another snap general election."

On the future of the Labour Party, Mason argues that it "must recalibrate its position" given his (wrong) belief that there can no possibility, ever, of a socialist Brexit. For Mason, the Par-

liamentary Labour Party is not in the midst of a vicious battle between Blairites and socialists, but is in fact a party united against the Tories. He argues “Jeremy Corbyn and Keir Starmer have forced May into a position she cannot carry with her own party”, talking as if Corbyn and Starmer were allies.

Mason explains that “The Tommy Robinson crew will riot if Brexit is cancelled; Nigel Farage will ‘re-enter politics’ and the Tories will split”, but optimistically concludes, “none of these are a catastrophe for the country.” This wrong-headed conclusion coming after he had just observed that UK’s “civil society and democracy might be irreparably damaged by an elite-manoeuvred sabotage of Brexit.”

Perhaps without realising it Mason then advocates capitulating to the solution proposed by the pro-EU Blairites by calling for Labour to embrace what many would consider to be “an elite-manoeuvred sabotage of Brexit”. As a matter of priority Mason says, rather than turn against the Blairites, he counsels firmness against the Labour left: “No more tolerance of the handful of Lexit-voting MPs.” And most importantly he suggests that Corbyn must now “Offer a second referendum on the final [Brexit] deal”.

He continues: “If a Corbyn government could secure a variation on a Norway-style deal, business and the unions would buy it; the xenophobes and Putin puppets could be faced down.” Yes, it is true that business and the Blairite trade union leaders would buy it, but I don’t quite see how embracing the EU will facedown the far-right. Mason however believes that such a clever strategy would enable Labour “to unite the country”; rather than simply unite Corbyn with the Blairites in their elitist embrace

of an undemocratic EU, thereby rendering Labour an electoral irrelevance.

Mason seems to believe that pro-Brexit voters can be convinced to change position if the “entire weight of a revived Labour machine” is able to make a clean break with all socialist criticisms of the EU, with valid criticisms like those that have been promoted by Corbyn for most of his political life. This leads Mason to his illogical conclusion that:

“An added bonus, for the Labour frontbench, would be that the (already diminishing) momentum for a millionaire-backed centrist party led by “12-20 Labour MPs”, as reported in *Skwawkbox* last week, would evaporate.”

This concluding remark is somehow cited as positive news, as if keeping the most die-hard representatives of the millionaire-class within Labour’s leadership is a good thing. At least Corbyn and his allies now knows what not to do if they want to win the next General Election.

July 12, 2018

Owen Jones and the Need to Leave the EU

In principle, it appears that Owen Jones is resigned to the necessary fact that Britain is leaving the EU. However, at the same time there can be no doubting that he still longs for the day when “the case to stop Brexit” is made more convincingly. Yet to be successful Jones believes that such a campaign would “need a completely different strategy” from the current one that has been being promoted by establishment politicians.

“[[I]t should launch itself as a grassroots, populist insurgency: rather than hosting EU flag-waving marches in remain citadels, it should hold mass public meetings and leafleting campaigns in leave areas, focusing on a positive case directed at those who are not enamoured with the EU (which is most people, including many remain voters). Its aim should be to shift public opinion so dramatically that calls for a new referendum become unanswerable.” (Jones, “I don’t like Brexit – I just don’t see how it can be stopped, *The Guardian*, January 3, 2018.)

This of course is not going to happen.

Nevertheless, despite his concerns, Jones is at least still able to understand that the ongoing campaign to overturn Brexit is very dangerous, stating:

“If the referendum result was simply cancelled, it would be regarded as a coup against democracy not

just by leave voters, but by many remainers. Faith in democracy may never be rebuilt – “more people voted for Brexit than for anything else in British history and the establishment thwarted it”, the refrain would go. It would surely be the greatest shot in the arm for the radical right in British history – not least because the result was in part due to a sense of resentment against a contemptuous political elite.” (January 3)

This leads Jones to conclude (albeit reluctantly) that “A Labour-managed Brexit that doesn’t shred our links with the EU and turn Britain into a low-regulation tax haven still seems preferable.”

What he means by maintaining links with the EU is not clear, but he is at least cognizant of that the fact that the number one priority for the labour movement must be to overthrow the Tories, not to call for a second referendum. Moreover, he correctly acknowledges that “Were it not for Corbynism, the radical right would have a monopoly on resentment of the status quo, and would be even stronger.”

On the growth and potential future growth of the far right, elsewhere Jones highlights how such ideas “have been fuelled and legitimised by the political and media elite,” but he also highlights the anti-working class role that has been fulfilled by Blair-ites.

“Today’s far right has many parents. The industrial era should not be glorified: many of the old jobs were dirty, unhealthy and often excluded women. But the disappearance of millions of secure manufacturing

jobs under both the Tories and New Labour in favour of the service sector had far-reaching consequences. Much of the work that replaced them was not only lower paid and more insecure: it had less prestige. The old work often conferred a sense of pride. Well-paid, secure jobs for those who didn't go to university disappeared, as did their communities based around mines, factories and docks. A sense of being ignored and abandoned set in. It nurtured grievances that waited to be fed upon." (Jones, "The Brexit traitor trope: how hard-right fantasies put us all at risk," *The Guardian*, June 13, 2018)

It is surely little wonder that British voters chose to reject the hopeless politics of the status quo by turning against the establishment and voting to leave the undemocratic bosses club that is the EU.

But if you thought the EU's anti-working class policies were not bad enough already, Jones reports that the Eurozone elites have further ramped up their demonization of refugees ("The EU's leaders are all smiles, but refugees will continue to drown," *The Guardian*, June 29, 2018). This is not too surprising really, and just a few days earlier Jones had explained how "Hungary, along with increasingly authoritarian Poland, is making an utter mockery of the EU's stated commitment to democracy and human rights." ("Hungary is making a mockery of 'EU values'. It's time to kick it out," *The Guardian*, June 22, 2018)

On this latter point Jones seems to have forgotten that the true meaning of EU's "stated commitment to democracy and human rights" is really just the same as the Tories similarly stated

commitments to these same principles... utter rubbish. We should never forget that the EU is a undemocratic ruling-class institution that exists to impose austerity upon the European working-class!

Jones knows all this already and on 1st June, also in the pages of the *Guardian*, he wrote how “Italy’s new government” – which is “certainly not social democratic, or remotely left of centre” – managed to rise to power partly because “The left in Italy has largely vacated the political stage” and also because of “the devastating economic consequences of the current incarnation of the eurozone.” (Jones, “If Brussels doesn’t budge, calamity beckons for Italy – and the EU,” *The Guardian*, June 1, 2018) In the same article Jones writes:

“A few months ago, a leading politician in Portugal’s ruling Socialist party explained to me the eurozone dilemma. Membership of the currency meant the public investment they desired was impossible. “It’s like social democracy was forbidden,” he explains...”

Jones went on to add:

“When Greece’s Syriza suffered its punishment beating, the European council president Donald Tusk said it was “ideological or political contagion” that he feared, not “financial contagion”. Greece had to be taught a lesson, in other words, to discourage Spain, Portugal and Italy from electing their own anti-austerity challenges to the eurozone.”

Ever keen to save the EU from itself, Jones however concludes from all this that “If the eurozone – perhaps even the European Union – is to survive, radical change is desperately needed.” But what I and many other socialists conclude from all this is that if the anti-establishment, anti-austerity politics of socialism are to ever flourish across Europe, then yes, the working-class must embrace radical change, but part of this change will entail ditching the EU once and for all.

At this present juncture in Britain, only a Corbyn-led Labour government, minus its Blairite saboteurs, would be able to deliver such an internationalist solution in opposition to the Eurozone establishment.

The way forward must be: Out with May; Out with the Blairites; and **Out of the EU!**

July 22, 2018

Why We All Suffer From George Soros' Bets on Liberal Democracy

The *New York Times* has always maintained a cosy relationship with billionaire power-broker George Soros, and in a recent article they reflect upon his ongoing nightmares in an article titled "George Soros bet big on liberal democracy. Now he fears he is losing" (July 17, 2018). This is a particularly informative article not least because it unwittingly makes an excellent case for abolishing capitalism.

To start with the article explains how Soros made his billions at the expense of the rest of the world. After joining Wall Street in 1956 Soros stated that he had initially had a five-year plan to save \$100,000 and then quit. But after surpassing this target, in the sixties he ploughed on and pioneered the use of hedge funds which apparently delivered 40 percent annual returns. But that wasn't enough either.

In 1992 Soros would then famously bet against the British pound and cause Black Wednesday, a shocking trade deal stole \$1.5 billion from the British public. As the *Times* reporter observes: "The sterling crisis turned hedge funds into the glamorous rogues of finance and demonstrated the punitive power that they could wield against policymakers in a world of free-flowing capital."

Money came easily for Soros when he was taking it from others, and in 1997 he was at the "center of a speculative attack on the Thai baht" which stole roughly \$750 million from Thailand's

working-class with “devastating” consequences. “Economic output plunged, banks and businesses folded and huge numbers of people were thrown out of work. The baht crisis rippled into other Asian economies.”

But, as the *Times* article states, “the only reason that Soros was still running a hedge fund [at this time] was to generate more money for his causes.” His own philanthropic causes of course; not causes that the public had any democratic control over mind you.

As ever, Soros’ philanthropic causes refers to his support for the type of civil society organizations that enable capitalism to flourish unhindered by democratic organizations that are funded by the working-class. The reporter stated:

“When I suggested that ‘center-left’ might characterize his [political] views... he said it wasn’t clear where he stood now because the left had moved further left, a development that did not please him. ‘I’m opposed to the extreme left,’ he said. “It should stop trying to keep up with the extremists on the right.”

The extreme left of course aim to privilege the needs of people before capitalism, so no wonder Soros is displeased.

The reporter goes on to observe how the “far left” have portrayed Soros as an imperialist who “foist[ed] the so-called neoliberal agenda (mass privatization, for example) on Eastern Europe.” Too right. Naturally those are exactly the type of democratic reforms that ensue when billionaires like Soros are at the decision-making table.

With regards the undemocratic nature of Soros' so-called "philanthrocapitalism" the journalist explains: "To those who object, this represents the privatization of social policy and, through the substantial tax benefits that charitable donations receive, it deprives the public sector of money that could be used to promote social welfare." Correct again!

But Soros' divisive and underwhelming social democratic reforms do not take place in a political vacuum, and the far-right are now seeking to capitalise on his political shortcomings, which have helped bring us to where we are today.

The *Times* is correct when they point out that "the financial sector has had a major role in worsening" the massive "income inequality" that has fuelled the current global backlash against capitalist globalization; and yes, "hedge-fund titans like Soros are powerful symbols of that inequality."

And yes, it is true that "The industry that made him a billionaire contributed significantly to the circumstances that now imperil what Soros the philanthropist has tried to achieve."

But while Soros is conveniently shielded from the consequences of his actions by his immense wealth, the rest of humanity have to live with his failures. And to make things worse, we then have to listen to Soros blaming us for the problems we are trying our hardest to address. Hence the *Times* tells us:

"He said democracy was in trouble because in many countries it had become sclerotic, insufficiently responsive to the public's needs. 'It's losing out,' he said. Illiberal democracy, of the sort that [Viktor] Orban

had fashioned in Hungary, was proving to be 'more effective,' for the time being at least."

And a little earlier the reporter writes:

"He told me that Orban's campaign was 'a big disappointment,' but quickly added, 'I think I must be doing something right to look at who my enemies are.'"

Orban of course was a "big disappointment" for Soros, and this is because Orban had been one of the thousands of elitist intellectuals that Soros had previously channelled his largesse towards. Soros is disappointed, but ordinary people have to bear the brunt of the violence unleashed by Orban and other far-right governments. Soros most certainly is not doing anything right.

Yet, as you might have expected, Soros has learned nothing about democracy. And in the face of the British public's decision to vote to leave the European Union, Soros is already seeking to reverse their democratic decision.

Bizarrely, but consistently, he has chosen to interpret the Brexit vote as another sign that democracy "had become sclerotic". Earlier this year Soros thus responded by donating "\$500,000 to a group called Best for Britain, led by [Lord] Malloch-Brown, that plans to push for a second referendum to undo Brexit."

Soros pays no heed to the democratic will of the people, or to calls from those who campaigned to leave the anti-demo-

cratic EU, and who continue to warn that demanding a second referendum will only help along the resurgence of the far-right in Britain.

Bringing all of Soros' contradictions to a head, the reporter highlights how:

“During my dinner with Soros, I pointed out that some political observers drew a straight line from Black Wednesday to Brexit, in that the 1992 crisis strengthened the position of the Euroskeptics in Britain's Conservative Party, the faction that ultimately pushed for and prevailed on the vote to leave the European Union. I asked Soros what he would say to a Brexit supporter puzzled by his seemingly contradictory roles in Black Wednesday and Brexit. His reply suggested he thought the answer was obvious. ‘This is the difference between my engagement in the markets, where my only interest is to get it right and make money, and my political engagement, where I stand for what I really believe in,’ he said.”

As Soros makes clear in this response, under capitalism money is always king. This is exactly why we need to continue to build — in the face of opposition from Soros and his elitist friends — the type of mass political organizations, funded by ordinary people, that can fight for socialism and the end of capitalism. The future of our lives rest upon us leading such a fight, and you can be rest assured that if we lead such a fight Soros, for one, will be very disappointed in us!

July 28, 2018

Peter Soulsby is Busy Attacking Corbyn Again By Calling for a People's Vote on Brexit

The right-wing of the Labour Party are opportunists pure and simple who will use any opportunity to undermine Jeremy Corbyn's socialist leadership of our Party. Rather than take the fight to the Tories, the Blairites and their allies would rather take to the streets to undermine Corbyn, whether that be on the issue of anti-Semitism or on the issue of Brexit.

It follows then that the People's Vote campaign on Brexit is naturally being led by exactly the type of careerist pro-austerity politicians that Corbyn has always opposed in Parliament. Yes, it is true that nearly all politicians (whether they represented Leave or Remain) lied about the consequences of the EU Referendum, but that is not a reason to have another vote. If anything, it is a reason to back Corbyn and fight for a General Election so he can make sure we get the socialist Brexit that we need.

The case for such a Labour-led Brexit was made this week by Corbyn when he explained that...

“...while the Conservatives are continuing as they always have done – kowtowing and skewing policy to the narrowest interests in the City of London while ignoring the needs of the vast majority in their bungled Brexit negotiations – Labour is setting out a genuinely new economic direction for our country.

...

“A botched Tory Brexit will sell our manufacturers short with the fantasy of a free trading buccaneering future which in reality would be a nightmare of our public services sold to multinational companies and our country in hock to Donald Trump whilst we all eat chlorinated chicken.

“It is why we are offering a real alternative to this dangerous Tory Brexit.

“A Labour Brexit could provide real opportunities as well as protections for our exporters...” (July 24, 2018)

But in contrast to such sensible words, a recent tweet from Lord Adonis — the gloating anti-Brexit Blairite — revealed that:

“Sir Peter Soulsby, the excellent Mayor of Leicester, is moving a motion in Leicester Council for a people’s vote on Brexit at next meeting on 4 October. Follows Liverpool, Swansea & many other towns & cities” (July 26, 2018)

Of course, there are many reasons why thousands of people were not happy with the Brexit vote, but a People’s Vote is not the answer. Instead the answer to the problems we all face is a Corbyn-led Labour government, and those who persist in opposing Corbyn by calling for a People’s Vote are only making it less likely that this will ever happen.

August 25, 2018

Britain Will Be “As Well-off, or Better-Off” if Labour Was In-Charge of Brexit Negotiations

Fakes news revels in attacking socialists. Just one of the latest examples of such relentless fakery has been the Tory media's fixation on saying that Jeremy Corbyn has failed to answer a simple question about whether Britain will be better off outside of the EU?

Corbyn cleared up this non-issue when he once again restated the obvious when he said:

“I recognise that I am not negotiating the EU withdrawal. I wish I was, because my priority in negotiations would be, trade access to Europe, would be a customs relation with Europe, would be protection of those rights, privileges and freedoms that we have gained through EU regulations, and I would be absolutely determined to do that. If you go down the road that is being promoted by the Tory right, of a deal with the United States, we undoubtedly would be a lot worse off. I think that the proposals that Labour is putting forward, and the way that Labour would conduct those negotiations, would make sure that people would be as well off, or better off. But fundamentally it is also about how we run our economy in this country because we would be investing for the future, instead of cutting for the future.”

As you might have expected, the Tory press has responded by claiming that Corbyn failed to answer their question!

As if this were not bad enough for Corbyn, to make things worse a small merry band of confused Momentum activists continues to refuse to accept Labour's principled position on Brexit, and persist in calling for another vote on the issue.

Here these apparent Momentum members are at odds with even Barry Gardiner — Labour's not-so-left-wing Shadow Secretary of State for International Trade — who understands that the main beneficiaries of such futile calls for a so-called "People's Vote" would be the far-right, noting that "You never give as much succour to the extreme right as when you cut off the mechanism of democratic change."

This brings me to a worse-than-idiotic online petition that is currently being shared by some confused Momentum members, which calls "for Labour to hold a vote at Annual Conference in September on giving the people the final say on the Brexit deal."

The signatories of this petition somehow believe that overturning a democratic vote will enhance Labour's electability. You couldn't make this stuff up!

Yet for all their talk of Labour supporting the Blairite calls from Chuka Umunna for a "People's Vote" the signatories of this petition make at least one good point, as their petition opens by stating:

"We deplore the persistent attacks of the right-wing of the Labour Party and their attempts to weaponise the issue of Brexit against our party leadership."

Too right: all Labour members should deplore the way in which Umunna and the right-wing of the Labour Party have been weaponizing the issue of Brexit against Corbyn.

Therefore it is ironic that the signatories to this petition have evidently failed to understand that if they are successful in forcing a change in Labour policy on the issue of holding a “People’s Vote” then they (as members of Momentum) would have been successful in helping such right-wing forces make it less, not more, likely that a Corbyn-led socialist government will ever come to power.

September 21, 2017

Why “The Left Against Brexit” Pamphlet is Wrong

Let’s begin with some facts, not scaremongering. Firstly, the European Union is an anti-democratic institution, which, ever since its founding, has been opposed by socialists (especially those on the so-called hard left). And secondly, Jeremy Corbyn supports a socialist Brexit.

So, it is with some irony that the socialist arguments against the EU are in the process of being inverted by self-defined “hard left” Labour activists like Michael Chessum, who is the very vocal organizer of Another Europe is Possible. A rare socialist whose group was the happy recipient of a £70,000 donation from the Blairite-led and George Soros-funded group Best For Britain. (“I’m hard-left, hard-remain’: grassroots bid for Labour Brexit seachange,” *The Guardian*, September 20, 2018.)

Earlier this month, Another Europe is Possible sought to mangle socialist opposition to the EU by releasing a fifty-page pamphlet titled *The Left Against Brexit: An Internationalist Case for Europe*, which begins:

“It’s increasingly clear that there is no such thing as a ‘good Brexit’, let alone a ‘people’s’ or ‘left’ Brexit – and this reality is gradually becoming obvious to millions of people in Britain. Brexit, after all, has always been a right wing project.”

This is not to say that the pamphlet's nine authors are not, at least, partially aware of the EU's anti-democratic history – the pamphlet makes various observations conceding that:

“[T]here is no excuse for ‘Fortress Europe’, which pours millions of euros into strengthening the EU's external borders and allows refugees to drown in the Mediterranean. There's no use sugarcoating it: these policies are racist, violent and morally unjustifiable.”

And that:

“Radicals need to make an unromantic assessment of the tasks at hand across the continent. The EU has many negative qualities – just look at its treatment of Greece.”

Or elsewhere the pamphlet notes:

“Today, the 751 seats of the European Parliament are dominated by right wing parties. Similarly, the European Council – in charge of defining the overall political direction of the EU – is made up of the heads of governments of member states, most of them supporters of neoliberalism and austerity. Finally, the European Commission (with one member from each EU state), has and most probably will have in the future a right-wing president. So yes, every institution is the EU is currently dominated by the right, austerity is the economic orthodoxy...”

In the same way, the contributors do, at times, also recognise that socialists have always historically opposed the EU. Manuel Cortes, the general secretary of the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA) union, rails against "Old anti-EU dogma blinkers" which he says, "blinkers them [the left] to political reality." This so-called old anti-EU left, of course, includes the socialist and democratic National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT). Cortes indirectly argues that RMT's position on the EU is "rot" before adding: "Like right-wing arguments in favour of leaving the EU, the Lexit 'facts' do not necessarily coincide with the truth."

Raising scaremongering to a muddled art, Cortes raises the threat of Brexit-related fascism, arguing that: "To join them, however unwittingly, in becoming a Brexit foot soldier is a serious dereliction of socialist duty."

He then states, absurdly, that defeating Brexit must become the "shared task" of the entire left; and calls for "a united front to defeat the alt-right's emerging fascist threat" as "To think otherwise is to fall into the dangerous 'social fascism' trap of yesterday."

Here Cortes is specifically referring to the rise to power of Hitler in the 1930s, and the appalling Stalinist position that led the Communist Party to refuse to cooperate with other socialists in defeating the rise of fascism. In this instance the Stalinists paved the way for Hitler's assumption of power by wrongly categorising the German Social Democrats as "social fascists." The irony is that no-one who advocates a socialist Brexit has called left remainers social fascists, and yet this is precisely what Cortes is implying when he claims that Lexiteers support a fascist

Brexit. Cortes also overlooks the fact that a Corbyn-led socialist Brexit would actually undercut the growth of fascist ideology, not promote it.

Cortes and his “People’s Vote” comrades should stop besmirching those who support a socialist Brexit by saying they are giving comfort to the far-right; moreover, Cortes should learn to accept that the British public has taken a democratic decision to leave the EU. Cortes might also recall a further irony, that it was Leon Trotsky and the socialist groups he was linked to — whose ideas help inform the political direction of principled anti-EU groups like the Socialist Party — who, during the 1930s, actively opposed the Stalinist “social fascism” nonsense and strived (albeit unsuccessfully) to unite the German working-class against their fascist foe.

Not content with such distortions, Cortes also erects a straw-man argument of the anti-EU left by stating that they are utopian in aiming to promote socialism in one country, which happens to be another Stalinist slogan that has always been opposed by other radicals on the left (including members of the Socialist Party). He writes: “Aspirations for ‘socialism in one country’, if it were ever possible, are not remotely the reality of our times.” But needless to say, if Corbyn led a socialist exit from the EU then it is abundantly clear that a critical part of his international activities would involve spreading socialist ideas across not only the remaining EU, but throughout the entire world!

In yet another hypocritical contribution to the pro-EU pamphlet under scrutiny, there is much to learn from Mary Kaldor’s chapter “Corbynism and Europe.” For those who might have

forgotten, Kaldor is an influential liberal imperialist who has previously spent nine years serving as a governor on the British government's premier democracy manipulating organisation, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. (Dame Margaret Hodge is New Labour's current representative on the Westminster Foundation's board of governors.)

Again, like many of the pamphlet's contributors, Kaldor does not entirely conceal the valid socialist criticisms of the EU; she opens her chapter by observing:

"For many on the left, the EU is viewed as an unaccountable 'capitalist club', enforcing neoliberalism across the continent. It is true that business and capital have hugely benefitted from the single market, and that the introduction of the euro meant the imposition of austerity rules and a growing inequality among debtors and creditors."

She then counters these observations with the oft-repeated and naïve assertion that "From the beginning [the EU] was designed as a peace project – the aim was to prevent the recurrence of fascism, imperialism and war."

Not a socialist herself, Kaldor finds it hard to understand working-class politics and thus makes a cardinal sin when she states that any form of Brexit "will make us even more powerless." She comes to these conclusions because she believes, wrongly, that "The only way to affect those global decisions [that oppose socialism] is through an organisation like the EU that has

the potential to tame globalisation.” Rather than seeing the potential for working-class organisations, inspired by Corbyn’s lead, to unite across Europe and the globe she therefore restates:

“The European Union is the only institution, at present, that has at least the potential to tackle the existential issues of our time: climate change, war and fascism, extreme poverty, global disease.”

These decidedly capitalist ideas contrast sharply with Michael Chessum’s own concluding chapter (authored with Alena Ivanova) which states:

“Only a transformative, socialist vision can compete with the politics of hate and the reality of social crisis. And the agents of change will be workers and ordinary people – in all their diversity – not the morally bankrupt establishment.”

Chessum’s over-riding error, however, is that the European Union itself is part of the morally bankrupt establishment that he rhetorically opposes. Yes, the agents of socialist change will certainly be workers and ordinary people, but the transformation of society along socialist directions will definitely not be aided by any efforts to undermine our country’s exit from the EU.

October 7, 2017

Loving the EU: Stalin, Blair, and the Socialism of Blockheads

The right-wing of the Labour Party are scared beyond belief. The end of the world is coming. Fascism is apparently on the march, and it is coming via Britain's impending exit from the European Union.

Yet if there is one accompanying idea that matches such unjustified paranoia, it is the Blairite fear of a Corbyn-led government overseeing a Brexit that places the needs of the working-class before that of the ruling-class. In the eyes of the Blairites and their unwitting allies' fearmongering reigns supreme, and contrary to other more measured socialist analyses, Brexit can only possibly spell out disaster.

David Winner illustrates such dizzying fear in his recent *New Statesman* article "How the left enabled fascism" (October 3) – which reveals its author as the blockhead that he truly is.

In order to conjure up his own uniquely misinformed historical smear Winner takes us back the years that preceded Hitler's rise to power in the early 1930s to make a direct comparison between Jeremy Corbyn and the leader of the German Communist Party (KPD), Ernst Thälmann.

In taking us on this historical interlude, Winner does the world one favour and one favour only: he reminds his readers of the unforgivable failures of the Stalinist KPD whose misleadership of the working-class allowed the Nazis to seize power. One

of the key failings of the Stalinists in this regard was the insistence of the KPD to categorise their social democratic rivals as “social fascists”. Winner writes:

“The theory, developed in the early 1920s, favoured by Stalin and established as Communist orthodoxy by 1928, held that reformist social democracy was the worst enemy of the proletariat – worse than fascism – because it created false consciousness and made revolution, the party’s overriding goal, less likely.”

This blockheaded nonsense on the part of the KPD was critical in preventing Germany’s powerful working-class from uniting in their efforts to overcome fascism. Disgustingly, as Winner correctly observed:

“As the Nazi menace intensified in the early 1930s, Thälmann continued to be sanguine. As late as February 1932, he was arguing that “Hitler must come to power first, then the requirements for a revolutionary crisis [will] arrive more quickly”. In November 1932, just three months before Hitler’s takeover, the KPD and Nazis even worked together in the Berlin transport workers’ strike.”

Having established that Stalinists have a lot to answer for – which of course was something that Leon Trotsky and other socialists always warned about, prior to, and during the time that these tragic events were unfolding – Winner then shows his inability to comprehend the historic lessons that must be gleaned from this era.

Winner achieves this mean feat of idiocy by comparing the Nazis seizure of power with Britain leaving the EU?! An intellectual contortion of gargantuan proportions that he is only able to achieve because of his own failure to comprehend that the class nature of the undemocratic EU, and his mistaken belief that leaving the EU can only have negative repercussions for the British working-class. Winner therefore says that just as Thälmann's actions allowed the rise of fascism, Corbyn's related embrace of "a destructive Brexit – for ideological reasons" will have the same catastrophic consequences for the left. Bizarrely Winner feels compelled to lecture his readers that...

"... although we again face danger from the far right, the far left refuses to work with potential allies in the centre and centre left. Again. Instead, it spends much of its energy attacking them. The obsessive hatred for "Blairites", "red Tories" and "centrists" is reminiscent of the KPD's hatred of "social fascists" during the years when Nazism could have been stopped."

To start with this is plain wrong: Corbyn, if anything, has bent over backwards to work with the Blairites who, for instance, continue to dominate the Parliamentary Labour Party. The adoption of such a mistaken and conciliatory approach to working with determined enemies of working-class interests (i.e. the "Blairites", "red Tories" and many "centrists") is highly problematic for those who would like to see a Corbyn-led government come to power. Especially for those millions who hope that such a progressive government might implement far-reaching socialist policies to benefit ordinary people.

In fact, a far-right government (even further to the right than Theresa May's Tories) is actually much more likely to come to fruition if the Blairites are not replaced by genuine socialists. Just look across Europe at the implosion of the other Social Democratic party's that have been crippled by their own homegrown Blairite blockheads. Blairites of course have never had any inclination to fight for the type of socialist solutions that can combat capitalist inequality!

Either way, Winner, in a strange pretence at balance asks: "Is it fair to speak of this [the KPD's de facto support for the Nazis] in the same breath as Corbyn's de facto alliance with the right on Brexit?" The obvious answer is no, Corbyn quite clearly has no truck with the reactionary lies of right-wing Brexiteers.⁵ Winner

⁵ An appropriate historical comparator with the EU referendum would be Germany's December 1929 referendum on the imperialist Young Plan. In this instance the German Social Democrats voted on the side of imperialist powers to back the Plan — which was similar to Labour's Blairite-led, mistaken pro-establishment call for a vote to Remain within the EU. At the same time the far-right made significant electoral gains from the plebiscite by being identified in the public mind as the only major political force participating in the referendum that stood opposed to the Young Plan. Notably, the German Stalinists refused to participate in the referendum despite the fact that they opposed the Young Plan — a mistake that is akin to that which was made by the Labour Party in refusing to give socialist leadership to the Leave campaign.

We might also add that owing to Corbyn's capitulation to the Blairites on the issue of the EU, the Labour Party failed to oppose the racist arguments of the far-right Leave campaigners, and many of the Blairite spokespeople for the Labour Party made this worse by promoting racist arguments for Remain. In fact, it is more accurate (historically-speaking) to describe the Blairites as acting as an anti-democratic Stalinist force with the Labour Party, a

however continues: “The stakes are less high, and the specifics are so different it’s hard to compare.” But in saying this, Winner goes on to compare Corbyn to Thälmann.

Such comparisons are, as one might expect, old hat for Winner. Earlier this year he responded to a tweet from Blairite *New European* columnist Tim Walker which stated: “Paradox of Brexit is the most left wing leader of Labour in my lifetime should also back Brexit, the most right wing policy of my lifetime.” (April 7) Winner’s comeback:

“No paradox. He’s following the model of co-operation between far left and far right from pre-1933 Germany. The Communist Party (KPD) worked with Nazis to bring down social democracy, thinking they could then crush the Nazis. Corbyn strategy also liable to be disaster” (April 8)

regressive force that abandoned working-class politics and in doing so contributed towards the growth of far-right politics in Britain. When one considers the Blairites adaption to racism, one recalls Trotsky’s (August 1931) warning that “the Stalinist bureaucracy strives more and more to act against fascism with its own weapon, borrowing the colors of its political palette, and trying to outshout it at the auction of patriotism.” (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, p.100)

For more on the Young Plan, see Clive Heemskerk, “Socialists and the EU referendum,” *Socialism Today*, July/August 2015.

In contrast to this reactionary tweet, in his *New Statesman* article Winner takes a more measured tone and acknowledges that Corbyn's failure to resist Brexit "isn't the same as seeking a Soviet Britain, or enabling Hitler." Nevertheless, Winner still warns that when Corbyn "blithely [talks] about a 'jobs-first Brexit'" he is running the "risk of hollowing out the political constituency [Blairites and "moderates"] best capable of resisting the radicalism of the right." Yet more blockheadness on Winner's part! What else did you expect? Winner goes on to conclude:

"Only in February 1933, by which time the battle was already lost, did Thälmann finally grasp the situation and propose a united front with the SPD [the Social Democrats] and the free and Christian trade unions – under his own leadership, of course – to prepare for a general strike to bring down the new regime."

The irony here is that in the present day, the trade unions could utilise a general strike to bring down the Tories, that is, if it wasn't for the fact that Blairites continue to infest the leadership positions of the trade unions (as they do the Labour Party). Despite these barriers, organising a general strike is still a possibility, but only if the rank-and-file of the labour movement continue to demand it and organise to make it happen.

Likewise, it will only be such determined grassroots pressure that can force the Tories out of power, sooner rather than later, which will then allow Brexit to be carried out so that is

benefits workers not bosses. But to carry out any of these socialist tasks, Corbyn's Labour Party would do well to remove the Blairite Thälmann's that continue to undermine his socialist leadership at every turn, and whose destabilising presence in the labour movement can only hasten the eventual rise to power of the far right.

As Trotsky counselled in reflecting upon "The German Catastrophe" of May 1933:

"One cannot, unfortunately, deny the superiority of the fascist over the proletarian leadership. But it is only out of an unbecoming modesty that the beaten [labour] chiefs keep silent about their own part in the victory of Hitler. There is the game of checkers and there is also the game of losers-win. The game that was played in Germany has this singular feature, that Hitler played checkers and his opponents played to lose. As for political genius, Hitler has no need for it. The strategy of his enemy compensated largely for anything his own strategy lacked." ("The German catastrophe: the responsibility of the leadership," May 28, 1933)

So, to conclude, there is no reason for defeat in the present-day if socialist leadership, unencumbered by the scourge of Blairism, is provided to the working-class. As even in the heat of battle against capital's dark forces Trotsky was adamant that the far-right could still be defeated if only the correct socialist leadership was provided. In December 1931, for instance, he explained:

“We are unshakably convinced that the victory over the fascist is possible – not after their coming to power, not after five, ten, or twenty years of their rule, but now, under the given conditions, in the coming weeks and months.” (“For a Worker’s United Front Against Fascism,” December 8, 1931)

Abolishing capitalism and replacing it with socialism is clearly possible. But to oversee this economic and political transformation of society it is evident that we need socialists, not socialist blockheads, to lead our class to victory.

October 11, 2017

The Socialist Workers Party and “British jobs for British workers”

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) like the Socialist Party (of which I am a member) are united in opposing the European Union for many good reasons. Nevertheless, one of the fundamental points of disagreement that exist between these two revolution-

ary political organisations revolves around the issue of immigration.⁶ The SWP demands open borders immediately, while the Socialist Party does not.

This important difference was raised by the SWP in an October 2015 essay “The internationalist case against the European Union” (*International Socialism*, Issue 148) which was authored by their leading theoretician, Professor Alex Callinicos. Towards the tail-end of this article Professor Callinicos takes a swipe at the Socialist Party writing:

“Disastrously, a section of the radical left in Britain links opposition to the EU to rejection of one of its core principles, the free movement of labour. Thus Peter Taaffe of the Socialist Party writes: ‘The alleged benefits of the ‘free movement of labour’ are in reality a device for the bosses to exploit a vast pool of cheap labour, which can then be used to cut overall wage levels and living standards.’ He goes on, absurdly, to argue that, if Polish workers ‘were forced to stay’ at home, presumably by immigration controls, there would be ‘a massive rebellion of Polish workers, which is coming in any case’.”

This is an unprincipled pot-shot at the Socialist Party’s internationalist position. As Taaffe explained in the aforementioned article:

⁶ For other significant differences between these two organisations, see Peter Hadden, “The struggle for socialism today – a reply to the politics of the Socialist Workers Party,” 1999.

“There is fear and resentment that scarce resources in housing, education and the NHS will not be sufficient if a new wave of immigrants comes to Britain. Only a programme offering fully-funded services and a crash house building plan, driven by a publicly-owned and controlled programme of public works, can assuage all workers’ fears.

“Cameron and the Tories support the import of cheap immigrant labour while denouncing immigrants who are allegedly living on benefits, which the government knows quite well, is only a tiny minority.

“In any case, even Cameron’s attempt to limit Polish immigration to Britain was met with a flat rejection by the Polish Prime Minister, Ewa Kopacz. The latter is only too happy to continue to ‘export’ her problems, encouraging poverty-stricken workers to flee the country. If they were forced to stay, she and the Polish capitalists would be confronted by a massive rebellion of Polish workers, which is coming in any case.

“Only common action across national boundaries, as well as within nations, can allow us to build a strong workers’ movement to confront the bosses and stop them from exploiting and gaining from divisions within the working class. This must include defending the rights of all workers who have moved across the continent in search of work to remain, if they wish

to do so, with full rights in the country where they now live.”⁷

Professor Callinicos’ willing misrepresentation of the Socialist Party’s position however does not end there, and a couple of paragraphs later he concludes:

“For the left to support immigration controls or demand ‘British jobs for British workers’ would be a disastrous capitulation to the chauvinism and racism of UKIP and the Tory right. Our objection to the free movement of labour is that it doesn’t go far enough: the borders should be open, unconditionally, not just to EU citizens, but to everyone.”

The clear and unfounded accusation is that the Socialist Party supports the reactionary demand of “British jobs for British workers,” an issue which has tied the SWP into knots of confusion for years. But this misrepresentation is no accident, and a quick search of the SWP’s web site with the search term “British jobs for British workers” (BJ4BM) throws up a series of related articles about the momentous working-class struggle that was the Lindsey Oil Refinery dispute of 2009.

The first SWP article dealing with this strike which is titled “Why British jobs for British workers is not the solution to the crisis” (*Socialist Worker*, January 30, 2009) evidently took its lead from the right-wing national media which tried to characterise

⁷ Peter Taaffe, “European Union Referendum: No to a Capitalist EU, Yes to a Socialist Europe!”, *The Socialist*, June 3, 2015.

the wildcat strike of Lindsey construction workers as being racist. The national media were able to do this by focusing all their coverage on a few placards that demanded “British jobs for British workers.” Following this negative national leader, the SWP’s highly problematic article was then followed by another lecturing frontpage article titled “Blame the bosses not ‘foreign workers’” (*Socialist Worker*, February 3, 2009).

Quick to accuse workers of racism, the SWP utterly failed to understand the nature of the militant Lindsey strike. In fact, one of the reasons why the few “British jobs for British workers” placards stood out so much was because there were no official union placards on the picket lines because the strike was unofficial, and initially took place against the wishes of the local union reps who were concerned with the consequences of striking in the face of the government’s vicious anti-trade union laws. In fact, the existing site reps resigned en masse just prior to the launch of the wildcat strike and the Lindsey workers were got around to electing their own unofficial strike committee a day after the strike had started. As the Socialist Party explained in our editorial “Firm strike leadership gains results” (February 4, 2009):

“This trade union consciousness of the need to act collectively led to the outbreak of these strikes. They know that the employers, hiding behind new EU directives and court rulings, are putting in jeopardy all that they have fought for and won on site after site over many years.

“In a magnificent dismissal of the anti-trade union legislation, these workers ignored the laws on issues like

ballots and picketing, in order to assert their right to tell the government and employers what they think, and demand changes.

“The media has concentrated on the slogans of some strikers that said: “British jobs for British workers” (which have partly or even mainly been a reaction to the same nationalistic phrase that was used by Gordon Brown). On the basis of this, some on the left have drawn the wrong conclusion that these are reactionary strikes.

“No workers’ movement is ‘chemically pure’. Elements of confusion, and even some reactionary ideas, can exist, and have done in these strikes. However, fundamentally this struggle is aimed against the ‘race to the bottom’, at maintaining trade union-organised conditions and wages on these huge building sites.”

At a public meeting organised shortly after the successful conclusion of the strike Socialist Party member Keith Gibson – who had been elected onto the unofficial Lindsey Oil Refinery strike committee and had served as the disputes chief spokesman — recalled how at the start of the strike...

“...there was no leadership there [on the picket line], and I believe that there was a vacuum at that particular stage where these slogans of ‘British jobs for British workers’ on posters which were downloaded off ‘Bear Facts’ [a construction industry] web site, there was a number of workers who had those particular posters.

And I thought at the time that that was a dangerous slogan to use. That was a slogan that was put forward and there was a certain amount of mixed understanding about what that slogan meant; and it was used straight away by the media to try to portray our strike as a racist strike, that we was striking against Italian workers coming in to do those jobs. And I made it, and strikers made it quite clear, that this was not a racist issue: this was an issue of an employer who wanted to try to divide the workforce and try to undermine the national agreement. It was nothing to do with racism. It was to try and get an agreement with an Italian employer to make them aware that we had struggled for thirty years to attain an agreement with pay and conditions and that we didn't want an Italian employer to undermine those particular demands. So that was going on.

“We were elected on the second day, there were six people elected to the strike committee on that particular plant. On the Monday the BNP turned up and we noticed them outside the main area where the workers was, and they was trying to give out racist leaflets to the workers, and it wasn't the strike committee that approached the BNP, it was the workers that were on strike, they went straight to the BNP and said that you shouldn't be giving those racist leaflets out on this particular demonstration and that we are asking you to leave as soon as possible – in front of the police – we want you to leave this dispute, you've have got no truck with the working-class and we want you to leave this particular dispute.”

Here it should be emphasised that throughout the dispute every effort was made to reach out to the foreign workers brought to the site by the anti-union subcontractor IREM. Moreover, the socialist demands agreed by the strike committee were accepted unanimously at a mass meeting of the striking workers (see our pamphlet “Lindsey, Visteon, Linamar: Lessons from the disputes of 2009”). These demands were far from racist and called for:

- No victimisation of workers taking solidarity action.
- All workers in UK to be covered by the NAECI [National Agreement for the Engineering and Construction Industry] agreement.
- Union-controlled registering of unemployed and local skilled union members with nominating rights as work becomes available.
- Government and employer investment in proper training/apprenticeships for the new generation of construction workers. Fight for a future for young people
- All immigrant labour to be unionised.
- Trade union assistance for immigrant workers, via interpreters, to give right of access to trade union advice – to promote active integrated trade union members.
- Build links with construction trade unions on the continent

While other demands included calling for the repeal of the ‘posted worker directives’ of the European Union which allow non-UK companies to be exempt from industry-wide collective agreements such as the NAECI. This was important because such workers do not benefit from having the same wages and protected conditions as the UK’s trade union organised workforce.

Right from the start of the dispute the SWP did not cover themselves in glory by acting to denigrate the workers who had agreed these radical demands, and not much has changed to the present day either. As the Socialist Party pointed out in an article titled “Deceptive denigration of Lindsey strike” (April 21).

“The SWP... even produced a pamphlet entitled *Why BJ4BW Won't Solve the Crisis*, of which only two pages are devoted to the strike itself. The pamphlet mentions that the final deal meant that of the 198 construction jobs involved, 102 would go to local previously unemployed construction workers, but does not mention that none of the foreign workers (Italians, etc) would lose their jobs for IREM, one of the companies contracted to carry out the work.

“It also approvingly mentions an Acas report that found ‘no evidence’ that the contractor companies had ‘broken the law in relation to the use of posted workers’ and that gave assurances that the contractor companies will abide by the NAECI agreement. But the law on posted workers only entitles them to ‘minimum’ labour standards, not NAECI standards, and this Acas report containing assurance of abiding by NAECI standards was only produced following the pressure of the workers’ action.”⁸

⁸ It is important to highlight that the Italian contractor IREM which was investigated by Acas was not unionised “and was believed to be flouting NAECI terms and conditions (which, tellingly, ACAS [2009] was unable to refute).” Gregor Gall, “The engineering construction strikes in Britain, 2009,” *Capital & Class*, 2012, 36(3), p.417. Gall adds that ACAS’s *Report of an Inquiry*

The Socialist Party article later noted:

“To suit this purpose, Martin Smith, the author of the SWP pamphlet, exaggerated the presence of the British National Party (BNP) in the Lindsey dispute in an article in *Socialist Review* [the SWP’s monthly journal].

“He wrote: ‘You don’t have to take my word for it – Tony Woodley, the joint secretary of Unite union, told the *Financial Times* ‘The British National Party are seriously and sizeably involved’. Since when have the words of Woodley been gospel, a ‘leader’ who has not organised the might of his union in support of the Lindsey or Vis-teon workers, and who has kept his own distance from their struggles?

“The racist BNP did attempt to intervene in the construction strikes but they were ignored or chased off the picket lines. If it had been left up to Martin Smith and his party then indeed the BNP might have been able to make some headway, but the conscious intervention of the Socialist Party and other left trade unionists elevated the need for workers’ solidarity in struggle, and that is what came to the fore.

into the Circumstances surrounding the Lindsey Oil Refinery found “that IREM had not broken the law and that the contract documentation stipulated that IREM, the concerned contractor, would pay the NAECI rate, but that ‘IREM were not yet in a position to provide evidence to demonstrate that they were doing this’. It (ACAS: 5) also raised issues as to whether the NAECI was being adhered to in terms of tea breaks, travel time allowance, and preparation time (for dressing in work clothing).” (p.428)

“The SWP leaflet given out on the Lindsey picket line said: ‘Those who support this strike are playing with fire’. What could this mean, except ‘don’t support the strike’? Yes, unfortunately they got it wrong, and all that they say now is a result of their wrong position from the beginning.”

In an unfortunately fairly typical example of uncomradely behaviour, the SWP deliberately misrepresented the Socialist Party as being “enthusiastic” about the “British jobs for British workers” aspect of the strike (“Desperate debates over desperate measures,” *International Socialism*, March 31, 2009). Continuing with their sectarian nonsense, the same journal article continued:

“Fortunately, there are many thousands of militant trade unionists with better instincts than Seamus Milne or the Socialist Party, who see the need for a struggle with the potential to unite all workers. This is shown by the 1,800 trade unionist activists, ranging from ordinary shop stewards to union executive members and even general secretaries, who signed the statement denouncing the ‘British jobs’ slogan.”

Such slurs were then repeated some months later when Martin Smith, pontificating in another confused article entitled “How do we stop the BNP?” (*International Socialism*, June 24, 2009), said that during the Lindsey dispute the “slogan adopted by many of the workers was ‘British jobs for British workers.’”

And, so it is hardly surprising that many years after the dust has settled on the dispute that the SWP would continue to disparage militant Lindsey workers in their vain attempts to put down the Socialist Party, as illustrated previously by their 2015 essay “The internationalist case against the European Union.” Nevertheless, life moves on, and as the Socialist Party concluded in their 2008 critique of the SWP’s decidedly problematic twists and turns:

“Our purpose has been to warn that, in this period of political reawakening, the policies and method they have pursued up to now will not only weaken them but harm the general struggles of the left in rebuilding the forces of the labour movement and socialism. We, for our part, intend to continue to pursue a policy of debate, dialogue and discussion with genuine left organisations as well as building and strengthening the Socialist Party. This is a precondition for rearming the labour movement for the battles to come. We are also prepared to unify our forces in practice with all genuine Marxist organisations on an agreed, principled basis.

“We will not, however, jeopardise the work of our members or supporters that we have built up in unprincipled amalgamations in which the approach of organisations differ so widely as to produce paralysis. This would only prepare the basis for further splits and schisms at a later stage. However, what we can do today is to bloc with genuine socialist and Marxist forces with their roots in the working class and the labour movement in the task of preparing the basis for a new,

mass left party in Britain. We have argued this case for over a decade and will continue to do this in the present period.

“We appeal to all those who have read and agree with our analysis and programme to join the ranks of the Socialist Party and the CWI [Committee for a Workers’ International]. A strong Marxist left is vital, providing the ideological backbone to any new formation that will arise in Britain.”

—Peter Taaffe, *Socialism and Left Unity: A Critique of the Socialist Workers Party* (Socialist Publications, 2008).

Additional Information

For more further criticisms of how the mainstream “media consciously chose to use the BJ4BW visually and verbally as the hook upon which to hang reporting of the strike,” see Gregor Gall, “The engineering construction strikes in Britain, 2009,” *Capital & Class*, 2012, 36(3), pp.411–31.

Likewise, another academic writer, Guglielmo Meardi, observed how. “In the Lindsey case, the role of the media was instrumental in depicting the protests against Sicilian contractor IREM as ‘xenophobic.’” (p.112) But Meardi notes that the misrepresentation of the strike was:

“Even worse... in the Italian media. Leftwing newspapers *il manifesto* and *l’Unità* devoted to it the whole

first page and compared the protests with the concomitant right-wing anti-migrant actions in Italy, while the state broadcaster RAI opened the reports from the safety of the Italian workers under alleged siege on their barge, and even provocatively interviewed Italian workers on Italian sites where British workers were employed, asking whether they wanted to take revenge for the treatment of their compatriots in England (for the bafflement in the interviewees)." (p.113)

Meardi continues:

"Such portrayal influenced national- and international-level trade unions. The largest Italian unions CGIL and CISL reacted with indignation. The European affairs officers of the largest Italian union, CGIL, Nicolosi and Petrucci, signed a declaration opening with the words 'What's going on in Lincolnshire is one of the ugliest pages in the history of the trade union movement in these globalized times: English workers against Italian workers' (Ufficio Stampa CGIL, 2 February 2009). However, if one moves from the official level to the local one, the picture was different. In its home town Syracuse (own interviews with CISL and CGIL union officers), IREM was known for its anti-union practices and for by-passing of national collective agreements (through the affiliation to the artisans', rather than employers' confederation). Unionists on the ground understood the British protesters for two reasons: they were not surprised that IREM would have tried to undercut British collective agreements on pay

(something that the arbitration body ACAS failed to investigate in its report), and agreed with the British concern on employment, given the Italian unions' practice to sign local 'employment continuity' contracts in large industrial sites or ports, to bind foreign contractors to the use of already locally employed workers (whether Italians or foreigners) and the respect of collective agreements. In short, as one unionist said, if the same problem with a foreign contractor had occurred in Syracuse, 'we would have done exactly the same'."

Guglielmo Meardi, "Union Immobility? Trade Unions and the Freedoms of Movement in the Enlarged EU," *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 2010, 50(1), p.113.

October 25, 2018

Why Social Democrats Can't Oppose The Growth of Europe's Far-Right: Or How Udo Bullmann Confronted Syed Kamall and Failed

Support for social democracy across Europe is reaching new lows. In Sweden, the Social Democrats have just “had their worst election result for more than 100 years” while the racist Sweden Democrats “increased their vote to 17.9 percent – their highest vote ever.” Likewise, the latest regional elections in Bavaria illustrated that the “decline of both the CSU (Bavarian counterpart of Merkel’s Christian-Democrat CDU) and SPD (Social Democrats) has indeed historic dimensions” for the German working-class with the SPD even polling below the far-right AfD. Moreover, as the German sister party of the Socialist Party has warned:

“The fact that trade union members and workers voted, above average, for the AfD, has to be seen as a warning sign. It expresses the alienation of those layers from establishment politics, especially the SPD, but also shows that the social questions were not put in the centre of attention or has been overshadowed by the issue of migration. One reason for this situation is the trade union leadership’s support for the grand coalition on a national level. Instead of organising an opposition on a class base, and education campaigns inside the workplaces revealing the AfD for what it is, an anti-workers’ party.”

These shortcomings should however be contrasted with last weekend's historic #unteilbar (“#indivisible”) protest in Berlin which drew 250,000 people out onto the streets in the fight against racism and for social justice.

“This was one of the biggest mobilisations in Germany since World War II, and a clear signal to all that the far right and right-wing populists may often be louder, but are not the majority.”

Backing for socialist ideas clearly exists in Germany, as elsewhere, but the Social Democrats are once again totally unwilling to provide the leadership for such a progressive movement. This is a longstanding problem that has deep historic roots of the utmost importance for working-class struggle.

For example, only yesterday the German leader of the Social Democrats in the European Parliament, MEP Udo Bullmann, was outspoken about the need for British people to be able to overturn the results of the Brexit Referendum. Bullmann's comment being made in opposition to the democratic will of the British people, but which nevertheless drew misplaced inspiration from the 700,000 strong anti-Brexit demonstration that had just taken place in London.

The Independent, a newspaper that was proud to throw its weight behind building last weekend's demonstration — which had been led by an unholy amalgam of Tories, Lib Dems and Blairites — noted how “Mr Bullmann's intervention is particularly significant because EU figures have so far been reticent to call for a second vote — for fear they might be seen as interfering in Britain's politics.”

Bullmann's anti-democratic intervention, which included a warning of a rise in extremist movements which he labelled "right-wing," then provoked an even more tragic response from the British Conservative Party's most senior MEP, Syed Kamall, who is the co-chair of the European Conservatives and Reformists in the European Parliament. (Kamall shares this leadership role with Ryszard Legutko, a MEP for Poland's Law and Justice party who is vehemently opposed to liberalism.) Kamall thus replied:

"I would remind you, when you talk about right-wing extremists, we have to remember that the Nazis were National Socialists. It is a strain of socialism. Let's not pretend."

Later the same day Bullmann released a statement in response to Kamall's "outrageous" outburst which explained:

"It is unbelievable how a member of this House can dare to associate the murderous Nazi regime with the Social Democrats. 85 years ago, the SPD was the only force in the Reichstag that voted against Hitler's Enabling Act, as other opposition had already been sent by the Nazis to concentration camps. The words by Otto Wels will be remembered forever: 'Freedom and life can be taken from us, but not our honour.' Social Democrats throughout Europe resisted Hitler's regime and paid for it with their lives. With his disgusting comparison, Kamall has mocked these brave people."

As if Kamall's dangerous statement were not bad enough, Bullmann's own response only serves to illustrate why Social Democrats have not been able (or willing) to lead the fight against the resurgent far-right today.

Yes, Bullmann is correct in saying that the SPD did vote against Hitler's Enabling Act (of March 23, 1933), and he is right in saying that ordinary members of the SPD did give their lives to resist Hitler's Nazi regime. But what Bullmann forgets to mention is that it was the cowardice of the right-wing leaders of the SPD, like Otto Wels, who are truly at fault for allowing the Nazis to come to power in the first place. This is because the SPD leaders were unwilling to put forward a socialist strategy that could have mobilised the working-class to bring down Hitler's Nazi regime.

This is a critical but not unexpected oversight, as the current rise of the far-right in Germany has only been possible because the current crop of leaders of the SPD, which includes Bullmann, have been utterly unwilling to place the needs of the working-class before those of big business and with it the demands of the EU.

Commenting on the SPD's immense betrayal for all European peoples in the 1930s, Marxist historian Rob Sewell is scathing:

"The National Socialists... were able to take power, scandalously, without any resistance ('without even breaking a window pane', to use Hitler's words). The labour leadership were completely bankrupt. To appease the Nazis, Otto Wels, the chairman of the SPD, resigned from the Bureau of the Labour and Socialist

International. The SPD leaders took disgraceful disciplinary action against the Berlin Socialist Youth and others who took clandestine measures against the fascist regime. They denounced their own comrades abroad who attacked Hitler. They grovelled before the Fuehrer as the iron-heel of fascist reaction bore down on the neck of the German working class.

“In early May, the police had occupied the SPD buildings and press and had confiscated its property. Yet the leadership stooped even lower to appease Hitler, and voted – at least those who were not in prison – for his foreign policy.

“A month later, in a reign of terror, the SPD was outlawed. The Catholic Bavarian People’s Party dissolved itself, as did the Centre Party, followed by the People’s Party and Democrats. On 29 June, Hitler’s coalition partners, the National Party, ‘voluntarily liquidated itself’ as the SA took over its offices.” — Rob Sewell, *Germany—From Revolution to Counter Revolution* (Fortress Books, 1988)

It is for these historic reasons why it is so important that a fighting socialist leadership must be given to all mass organisations of the working-class, whether they be trade unions or political parties. Social Democrats have once again demonstrated that they are not up to the task of putting workers first, and so it is incumbent upon the working-class to unite and fight for a socialist alternative.

November 1, 2018

The Left Case Against the EU

Costa Lapavitsas is well positioned to offer meaningful insights into the reactionary nature of the European Union. In January 2015, Lapavitsas was elected as a member of parliament for Syriza and so witnessed first-hand Greece's humiliating capitulation to the EU. His experiences of confronting the EU are therefore particularly relevant for working-class activists across the world as he was "a leading figure" of Syriza's socialist faction, Left Platform. This was an important faction which mid-way through 2015 formed the basis of the creation of a new breakaway anti-austerity coalition called Popular Unity, which was created in the wake of Syriza's capitulation to the EU.

Socialist Party TD for Dublin South-West, Paul Murphy previously noted that just days before Lapavistas' successful election in January 2015 the Greek politician had co-authored a book entitled *Against the Troika: Crisis and Austerity in the Eurozone* with Heiner Flassbeck. A book whose conclusions, Murphy observes, were "borne out entirely" when the co-authors wrote:

"There is, thus, a kind of 'impossible triad' that would be faced by a Left government in the periphery. It is impossible to have all three of the following: first, achieving effective restructuring of the debt; second, abandoning austerity; and third, continuing to operate within the institutional and policy framework of the EU and particularly the EMU... It would be foolish for a Left government to imagine

that the EU would bluff on the issues of debt and austerity... If a Left government attempted to play a bluffing game, it would fail very rapidly.”⁹

Lapavistas, who is currently employed as a professor of economics at the University of London, has now made another insightful contribution towards a socialist appreciation of the class nature of the EU with his just-released book *The Left Case Against the EU* (Polity Press). He opens this book by highlighting the sharp disconnect between reality and “The image that the EU increasingly sought to project” during the 1990s and 2000s of itself as “a beacon of democracy, individual rights, and social protection.” “A novel political entity appeared to have been created in Europe,” Lapavistas adds, “a monument to solidarity and peace after the bloodbaths of the twentieth century, which seemed to combine

⁹ Flassbeck and Lapavistas cited in Paul Murphy, “New movements, old dilemma - Reform or Revolution today,” *Socialist Party (Ireland)*, January 13, 2016. Murphy however goes on to explain how “Despite this perspective, [Flassbeck and Lapavistas] were entirely unprepared for the speed and scale of the sell-out of the Syriza leadership. The Left Platform approach to the Syriza leadership mirrored the approach of the Syriza leadership to the EU. While Tsipras failed to prepare Syriza for the nature of the clash with the EU institutions and of the need for a rupture with the euro, Lafazanis failed to prepare the Left Platform for the likely capitulation by Tsipras, for a clash with him and for a rupture with Syriza.

“One result was that on the first vote on austerity measures most Left Platform MPs voted for them or abstained – which served to confuse people. They continued a rhetoric of party unity with Syriza after it had become clear that Tsipras was determined to drive the left out of the party and to reconstruct Syriza as a safe party of austerity.”

political liberalism and economic neoliberalism.” But despite the best efforts of the EUs insidious propaganda offensive, which gained the helping hand of Europe’s best and brightest right-wing ‘social democrats’, this misleading image lay in “tatters” following the global crisis of 2007–9 and the Eurozone crisis of 2010–12.

Of course, the EU has always been a bosses’ club, but in the wake of capitalism’s inevitable crises, the few gestures towards democracy that resided within the EUs technocratic institutions have been brushed aside. “Liberal democracy was gradually hollowed out in Europe” by the pro-business political elites and EU technocrats, and as Lapavitsas correctly points out, “the blame for that lay squarely with liberal democracy itself.” Power was increasingly transferred upwards towards the EUs ruling-class, which led to “an unprecedented sense of powerlessness” among an increasingly impoverished working-class majority. Such dire consequences had been predicted by socialists when Britain first joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, and it is notable that “the strongest opposition” to Britain’s incorporation within such an undemocratic institution was to be “found in the Labour Party and the trade unions.” Without a doubt, the EEC was correctly “perceived by the Left as a capitalist club that would harm workers’ interests and damage British sovereignty.”¹⁰ Far from being a harbinger of peace and democracy, the roots of the European project lay firmly within the geopolitical priorities set by the Cold War. Lapavitsas explains how:

¹⁰ Lapavitsas, *The Left Against the EU*, p.3, p.4, p.5, p.7.

"From the 1950s to the 1970s the EEC functioned as an alliance created at the peak of the Cold War - with the support of the USA - which provided a further bulwark against the USSR in Europe. It was essentially a customs union coupled with a pact for the promotion of the coal and steel industries and the protection of Western European agriculture." (pp.13-4)

As one might expect, Lapavitsas goes on to provide informative insights into the crushing economic policies that have been propounded by our neoliberal masters in the EU. But in this short review I merely aim to focus on some of the highlights of his penultimate chapter which is entitled "Greece in the Iron Trap of the EU." Therein Lapavitsas refers to the storms of austerity which pumelled Greece throughout most of the 2010s as a "veritable testing ground for theories and ideologies about Europe as well as a laboratory for European neoliberalism." This leads him to warn that: "If nothing else it shows what the European Left must avoid doing at all costs."

During this testing period for the Left, Lapavitsas describes the woeful behaviour of the Greek Communist Party (KKE) which traditionally had been the "largest organization" of the Greek Left. He observed how instead of leading a mass struggle against the EU the KKE "sought refuge in ultra-leftism" and "failed entirely to propose a political programme that would confront the key class questions of the crisis, that is, the debt and the euro." By vacating the political battle-ground in this way, the KKE thereby provided a space on the Left into which SYRIZA could prosper. But like any other mass working-class party, SYRIZA was awash with competing ideas for how to wage the fight against the dictates of

the EU. On the one hand there existed the leadership of SYRIZA, organised around Alexis Tsipras, who sought to avoid a break with the EU by engaging in "'tough negotiations' with the European lenders." On the opposing side of SYRIZA was the Left Platform which "appreciated the dead-end which the strategy of the leadership actually represented, and argued for default and exit" from the EU.¹¹

Lapavitsas highlights how "the Finance Minister of SYRIZA, Yanis Varoufakis, who did not belong to the party's left wing, indeed did not even hail from the Left altogether, contributed avidly to the analytical confusion that led to the debacle" of SYRIZA's eventual selling-out to the EU.¹² Indeed, both Tsipras and Varoufakis's dismissal of the Greek working-classes will to leave the EU makes more sense when you consider the latest comments made by Varoufakis in an interview with *BBC HARDtalk* (September 29, 2017). In this interview Varoufakis arrogantly expounded upon his own (worse than useless) class collaborationist efforts to counter the rise of the far-right across Europe, explaining:

"The reason why some of us created the Democracy in Europe Movement (DiEM25), which seeks to be a movement bringing not just the left, but also liberals, even progressive conservatives – those of us who are eager to agree on a believable, credible progressive agenda for Europe. This is why we created

¹¹ Lapavitsas, *The Left Against the EU*, p.83, p.106, p.107.

¹² Lapavitsas, *The Left Against the EU*, p.108.

DiEM25, because we do not believe that the left has what it takes at the moment."¹³

But such blockheadedness is nothing new for SYRIZA's former Finance Minister. For instance, we shouldn't forget that within a month of SYRIZA sweeping to power in January 2015, Varoufakis was busy holding forth to the same defeatist arguments in Britain's liberal press. Speaking with genuine honesty he admitted: "I also bow to the criticism that I have campaigned on an agenda founded on the assumption that the left was, and remains, squarely defeated." (Yanis Varoufakis, "How I became an erratic Marxist," *The Guardian*, February 18, 2015) So it was not really a surprise when just three days after making this admission, Varoufakis allowed SYRIZA "to suffer a complete rout" when he signed (on February 20) SYRIZA's now "infamous deal" with the EU. This sordid moment led to an internal revolt within SYRIZA, which was led by Lapavitsas and the other members of the Left

¹³ Yanis Varoufakis, "HARDtalk Interview," *BBC World News*, September 27, 2018. On the matter of the formation of DiEM25, which was launched by Varoufakis in the wake of the SYRIZA debacle, Lapavitsas argues that Varoufakis has failed to learn any lessons from the "disaster of SYRIZA... since the [DiEM25] demands are in essence the failed SYRIZA approach writ large." Lapavitsas continues: "The lack of appreciation of the class and national nature of the EU is evident. DiEM25 might well produce a 'creative interpretation' of the Treaties of the EU, generating eloquent documents and intricate arguments, but it has absolutely no chance of also making it an effective interpretation." Lapavitsas, *The Left Against the EU*, pp.121-2. This failure of vision on the part of DiEM25 is even more concerning given that John McDonnell supports their activities and presently serves upon their international advisory panel.

Platform, which Lapavitsas says was contained by Tsipras who "managed to manipulate the dissent within his party" to see off their show of internal resistance.

By immediately bowing to the EU, SYRIZA's leadership were making it clear to the world (and the EU bullies) that they were unwilling to rely upon the organised self-activity of the working-class to secure a positive future for the Greek people which might have forced the Government into making a decisive break with the EU. As Lapavitsas concludes, to challenge the EU would...

"...have required mass popular mobilization in Greece and a sharpening of domestic class opposition to the point of breaking the power of the Greek historical bloc. Alexis Tsipras is not made of such stuff."
(pp.109-10)

This early rout however was followed by the triumphant Greek referendum of July 2015 when the majority of the Greek working-class – in the face of “a frantic campaign of misinformation and scare-mongering” -- voted No, to reject the terms of the Troika. Yet under the continuing leadership of SYRIZA this triumph was soon turned on its head. Therefore, even though the great majority of Greek people had demonstrated that “they were ready for a fight” against the undemocratic EU, “Tsipras cynically turned No into Yes, and became an obedient tool of the lenders by fully signing up to a new bail-out.” Lapavitsas explains that the lesson to be learned from this shameful rejection of working-class politics is that a "left government" faced with similar attacks from the EU

must "prepare for rupture" with their blackmailers and so be prepared "for a direct challenge to and even rejection of the EU."¹⁴

But just as SYRIZA made mistakes, so too did Lapavitsas' Left Platform which successfully split off from SYRIZA in August 2015 and created Popular Unity (PU) so they could stand as a progressive force in September's snap election. At the time, the Socialist Party's sister organisation in Greece, Xekinima, supported this breakaway, but were frustrated at every turn by the lack of a clear socialist approach from the PU leaders. Writing in mid-2017, Xekinima member Andros Payiatis stated:

"The PU leadership made a number of crucial mistakes. Firstly, its campaign concentrated on switching to a national currency – its 'programme' was not only too limited, it was incoherent. It argued in favour of leaving the eurozone and refusing to pay the debt, but remaining in the EU! Leaving aside the fact that this was far from a radical, anti-capitalist, socialist programme, it represented an impossible combination of demands.

"The second major factor was the arrogance of the leadership and its top-down bureaucratic approach. Thousands of mainly non-aligned left activists approached PU when it was formed, hoping that it could provide a way out. But they were disappointed and turned away. They had seen this before and had not liked it then: an established leadership

¹⁴ Lapavitsas, *The Left Against the EU*, p.111, p.112.

(locally and nationally) that accepted no questioning; a pre-set programme that was not to be discussed; and a campaign to elect MPs who were appointed and not elected by the rank and file! Just before election day the PU leadership realised that things were not going well and made a last minute democratic turn, but it was too late.” (“Greece: The rise and fall of Syriza,” *Socialism Today*, July-August 2017)

None of these problems were unsurmountable, but were made harder to overcome when other leaders of left-wing European parties choose to side with Tsipras in the aftermath of the Greek referendum.¹⁵ One of the most notable of these leaders was Bernd Riexinger, the co-chair of Germany’s Left Party (Die Linke), whose 2017 article “Illusions of EU exit” is cited by Lapavitsas to highlight how some left party’s still believe that the EU “ought to be defended.”

However, Riexinger or, for that matter, any other German Left’s who back such naïve political positions, are constantly opposed by fellow socialists, particularly by members of the Socialist Party’s German sister organization, Sozialistische Alternative (SAV). Indeed, SAV continue to campaign within Die Linke and the broader working-class more generally for “the preparation of a

¹⁵ Interview with Andreas Payiatsos, Xekinima (CWM in Greece), by Lucy Redler, SAV (CWM in Germany), “Greece: What does ‘Popular Unity’ stand for?,” *Committee for a Workers’ International*, August 28, 2015.

combative anti EU election campaign for the forthcoming European elections in 2019.”¹⁶ Such ongoing battles for the future of left-wing parties will be critical to the growth of socialist politics across Europe, and so it is disappointing that the primary article that Lapavitsas refers his readers to in order to understand “the change in the dominant attitude” of those on the Left (towards an embrace of the EU) is Alex Callinicos’ 2015 essay “The internationalist case against the European Union.” This choice is disappointing, because Callinicos, who is the leading theoretician for the British-based Socialist Workers Party, deliberately uses this essay to distort the Socialist Party’s position on the EU and likewise misrepresents the Socialist Party’s arguments for opposing the SWP’s ultra-left immigration demands for open borders.¹⁷

Nevertheless, Lapavitsas is clear that the main problem is not on the far-left: the forces of the European Left with the “strongest” illusions in the progressive nature of the EU are social democrats.¹⁸ Confusingly he then conflates what he calls “the Left” with Social Democratic parties, when he argues:

¹⁶ Sascha Staničić, “Germany: Government disunited, and debates within the Left Party,” *Committee for a Workers’ International*, June 26, 2018.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the question of opposing campaigns for “open borders” in the German context, see Sascha Staničić, “Germany: Government disunited, and debates within the Left Party,” *Committee for a Workers’ International*, June 26, 2018. And for a related discussion of the astonishing political zig zags of the SWP’s German sister organisation, see Peter Taaffe, *Socialism and Left Unity: A Critique of the Socialist Workers Party* (Socialist Publications, 2008), pp.79–83.

¹⁸ Lapavitsas, *The Left Against the EU*, p.129.

“Therein lies the problem with the Left in Europe today. Its attachment to the EU as an inherently progressive development prevents it from being radical, and indeed integrates it into the neoliberal structures of European capitalism. The Left has become increasingly cut off from its historic constituency, the workers and the poor of Europe, who have naturally sought a political voice elsewhere. The result has been politically catastrophic, especially for the social democrats, who are rightly perceived as staunch defenders of the status quo. Inevitably the vacuum created by the Left has been steadily filled by some of the worst political forces in European history, including the extreme Right.” (pp.129-30)

This statement is not really true. It is not the attachment of social democrats to the EU that prevents them being radical, but their commitment to capitalism that prevents them being radical -- which of course helps us better understand their willing embrace of the EU. It is however true to say that over the past half century or so, neoliberal attacks on genuine Left forces -- whether they be Marxist or democratic socialist -- have meant that Left ideas have been forcibly evacuated from Europe's many mass working-class parties, and that is certainly a problem.

But we should also remember that to date, despite the best efforts of European social democrats, "there has never been a mass movement of workers in favour of the EU or the EEC, but at

most a sullen acceptance.”¹⁹ This should bring hope to socialists across Europe. In the same way we should take inspiration from the massive popularity of Jeremy Corbyn’s democratic socialist ideas which are now giving fresh hope to the British working-class who for so many years were forced to endure the dark years of first Neil Kinnock and then Tony Blair.

Most importantly it is not an insignificant fact that Corbyn himself has been a lifelong critic of the EU, and that his politics align with “the working class and the plebian strata have generally tended to support Brexit.” Thus, as Lapavitsas correctly points out:

“The vote to Leave became a vote against the dominant wing of the British historical bloc, which had expressed its preference for Remain. It was a vote by proxy against austerity, poor jobs, and the decline in welfare provision, particularly since the great crisis of 2007–9. Moreover, far from representing a surrender to racism, rabid nationalism, and right-wing authoritarianism, the referendum facilitated the radicalization of British politics in an unexpected way. The Conservative Party barely won the general election of 2017, and the real victor was a revived Labour Party, with a manifesto based on a social democratic programme opposing austerity and even calling for

¹⁹ Lapavitsas, *The Left Against the EU*, p.128. “On the other [hand], the privileged layers, including broad sections of the professional middle class with access to the media, the universities, research institutes, and so on, have become closely attached to the notion that the EU stands for progress.” (p.128)

nationalization of the railways and other resources.”
(p.139)

This is why under Corbyn’s leadership, the Labour Party remains committed to leaving the EU. On the other hand, this also explains why the Blairite social democrats -- who still dominate the leadership positions of much of the Party -- are doing their best to undo Brexit. Once again, the anti-democratic actions of the Blairites in this regard provide yet another sterling reason why the Labour Party’s rank-and-file must persist in demanding the reinstatement of democratic selection processes within their party -- a good example being the urgent need for the reintroduction of mandatory reselection.

Much still needs to be done to reconstitute mass Left forces across Europe, and a critical part of constructing a viable program that can unite the working-class will involve opposing the EU, which Lapavitsas accurately describes as nothing more than “a transnational juggernaut geared to neoliberal and hierarchical motion.”²⁰ “Workers’ internationalism always starts at home,” Lapavitsas reminds us, and if “capitalism was challenged domestically, several forms of socialist federal integration would become possible in Europe.” “That is a feasible and worthwhile aim for the European Left,” he adds, and the “sooner it begins to engage in open debate and to act along these lines, the better for the people of the continent.”²¹

²⁰ Lapavitsas, *The Left Against the EU*, p.122.

²¹ Lapavitsas, *The Left Against the EU*, p.141.