

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4631>



European Union

Offensive against the EU from left

- Debate - European Union -

Publication date: Friday 29 July 2016

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

The majority for Britain leaving the EU was an expression of class revolt against the EU of the upper class. This provides a good starting point for the Left to become the head of a rebellion against the EU, which has been the hub of social dumping, erosion of tax-financed welfare schemes and democratic influence, suppressing all attempts to depart from neoliberal policies and total failure to respond to the climate crisis. If the Left doesn't manage to take the lead in this fight - on an anti-racist and internationalist basis - it will be more or less racist forces of the extreme Right that will profit.

The majority for Britain leaving the EU has shaken the European bourgeoisie. Massive popular opposition to the development of EU has been known and recognized for years - and was repeatedly expressed when someone dared to call a referendum on some European issues. However, in spite of this fact, we got used to see the EU project being sneaked forward all the time and people's ability to influence being continuously undermined. It is characteristic that Cameron is now being criticized for having "gambled" with the project by allowing a democratic vote on EU membership itself...

Brexit succeeded to shortcut this process, so far in one country. From a democratic point of view, this is a huge victory. A crisis for the EU is invariably a victory for the working class.

Class or racist agenda?

However, the reason for the massive EU opposition of the English working class was rather social than democratic. The EU was - as in other EU countries - both symbol of and played an important role in the neoliberal pressure for violent austerity and soaring economic inequality. A large number of immigrant workers from Eastern Europe and a significant level of unemployment have meant massive pressure on wages and working conditions in a country where Thatcher thoroughly smashed an otherwise strong trade union movement. Amongst other with reference to the free movement of labour within the EU, the conservative government attacked all tax-funded welfare systems - and for instance introduced towering fees on education.

In the British referendum campaign right populist, xenophobic forces were largely allowed to take over this agenda. Instead of uniting for a battle against the capitalist EU and against the employers who exploit EU's anti-labour divide-and-rule policies - large parts of the labour movement and the Left downplayed these problems and supported remaining in the EU. Some did so precisely out of fear for support to a nationalist and xenophobic agenda and migrant workers losing their jobs. However, this resulted in the xenophobic UKIP becoming the dominant party in the Leave campaign and now stands as the big winner of the referendum.

Hesitate or persist?

But let the past lie. Now, the question is how the Left should respond to this crisis for the EU. Should we "hold our horses" and hold back - with regard to nationalist and xenophobic parties that currently dominate resistance to EU in most countries? Or should we continue and intensify an uncompromising struggle against the institution EU and seize upon the option right now to provoke the collapse of this campaign engine for neoliberal attacks against the working class?

In our view, undoubtedly the latter is the right path. It has never been a successful strategy standing on the side of the ruling system in order to keep the far right from power. If the Left does not take on the battle against the system and provides an alternative, then it leaves legitimate anger and rebellion to the propaganda of the extreme right. At worst, the Left will even look as half-hearted supporters of the rotten system. And when the system tumbles, then forces of the Right takes over....

The same applies in the present situation: If the Left appears as not really fighting big business EU - then UKIP, Le Pen, Alternative für Deutschland, Danish Peoples Party etc. will first profit from the rebellion and secondly maybe even be victorious.

A left alternative to EU

For that reason, it is an urgent task for the Left across Europe to take the lead in the confrontation both with the EU as an institution - and with the policies of the EU:

Demanding that the EU in all areas should be rolled back and disregarded - that Member States must legislate against social dumping, defend their tax-funded welfare systems, stop the EU-dictated austerity and privatization policy, safeguard their environment, make climate adjustments based on public production, etc., etc.

Making demands based on anti-racism and international solidarity: The fight against social dumping is not a battle against migrant workers, but demands for collective agreements and national legislation preventing employers to underpay and exploit migrant workers. The European countries must welcome refugees - but it should be financed by the wealthy and not be at the cost of welfare.

Demanding a breakaway from the EU and the neoliberal foundation of the Lisbon Treaty - including withdrawal referendums as a tool to push the EU to collapse.

Demanding the establishment of a new European cooperation that respects democratic decisions in the Member States, including on their economic policy. Cooperation on environment, climate change, refugees, corporate tax, etc., based on intergovernmental minimum agreements - but with the right to proceed further.

Of course, these demands must be raised in Parliament - but first and foremost the task is to build a movement fighting for these demands. Movements that can and will work together and show solidarity across borders for an alternative agenda for Europe. We have already seen promising signs of this regarding refugee solidarity, in the fight against climate change and in some union contexts.

A legitimate popular revolt against capitalist EU is growing in both northern and southern Europe, although from different points of departure. We must not leave this revolt to the xenophobic right parties, which in no way will defend working class interests, on the contrary. Fortunately, there are also signs that the Left in the rest of Europe is losing their illusions about reforming the EU and that more and more realize the necessity of formulating a "plan B": An alternative, if (i.e. when!) the break with EU is necessary.

The Left in Europe must assert its natural place as those who take the lead in fighting and confronting the capitalist and neoliberalist steamroller named EU.

July 2 2016